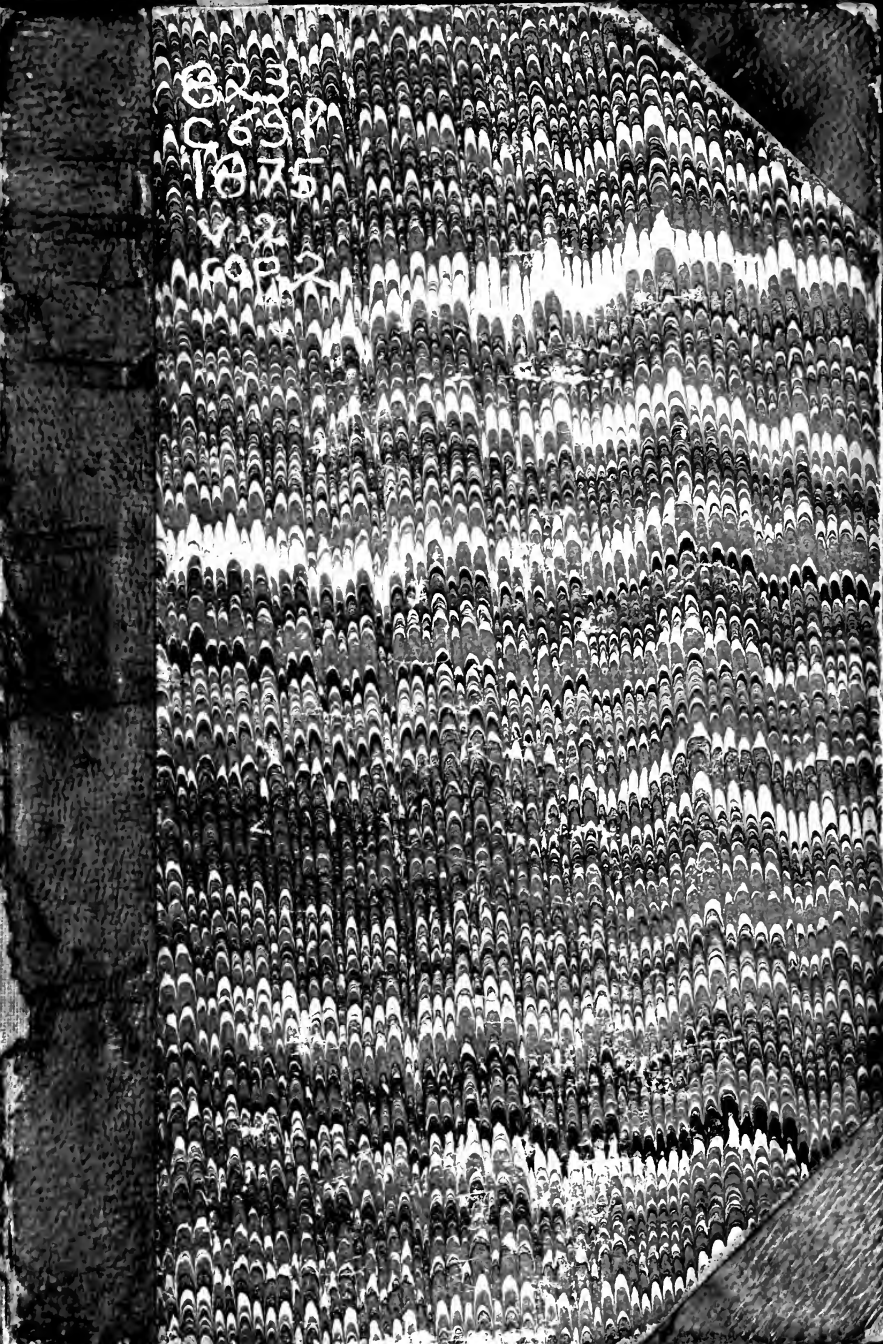


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# THE LAW & THE LADY

*A NOVEL*

BY

WILKIE COLLINS

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1875

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# THE LAW *and* THE LADY.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE STORY OF THE TRIAL. THE PRELIMINARIES.

LET me confess another weakness, on my part, before I begin the story of the Trial. I cannot prevail upon myself to copy, for the second time, the horrible title-page which holds up to public ignominy my husband's name. I have copied it once in my tenth chapter. Let once be enough.

Turning to the second page of the Trial, I found a Note, assuring the reader of the absolute correctness of the Report of the Proceedings. The compiler described himself as having enjoyed certain privileges. Thus, the presiding Judge had himself re-

vised his charge to the Jury. And, again, the chief lawyers for the prosecution and the defence, following the Judge's example, had revised their speeches, for, and against, the prisoner. Lastly, particular care had been taken to secure a literally correct report of the evidence given by the various witnesses. It was some relief to me to discover this Note, and to be satisfied at the outset that the Story of the Trial was, in every particular, fully and truly told.

The next page interested me more nearly still. It enumerated the actors in the Judicial Drama—the men who held in their hands my husband's honour, and my husband's life. Here is the List :

THE LORD JUSTICE CLERK,	}	Judges on the Bench.
LORD DRUMFENNICK,		
LORD NOBLEKIRK,		
THE LORD ADVOCATE (Mintlaw),	}	Counsel for the Crown.
DONALD DREW, Esquire (Advocate- Depute),		
Mr. JAMES ARLISS, W.S.,		Agent for the Crown.
THE DEAN OF FACULTY (Far- michael),	}	Counsel for the Panel (otherwise the Prisoner).
ALEXANDER CROCKET, Esquire (Advocate),		
Mr. THORNIEBANK, W.S.,	}	Agents for the Panel.
Mr. PLAYMORE, W.S.,		

The Indictment against the Prisoner then followed. I shall not copy the uncouth language, full of needless repetitions (and, if I know anything of the subject, not guiltless of bad grammar as well), in which my innocent husband was solemnly and falsely accused of poisoning his first wife. The less there is of that false and hateful Indictment on this page, the better and the truer the page will look, to *my* eyes.

To be brief, then, Eustace Macallan was 'indicted and accused, at the instance of David Mintlaw, Esq., Her Majesty's Advocate, for Her Majesty's interest,' of the Murder of his Wife by poison, at his residence called Gleninch, in the county of Mid-Lothian. The poison was alleged to have been wickedly and feloniously given by the prisoner to his wife Sara, on two occasions, in the form of arsenic, administered in tea, medicine, 'or other article or articles of food or drink, to the prosecutor unknown, or in some other manner to the prosecutor unknown.' It was further declared that the prisoner's wife had

died of the poison thus administered by her husband, on one or other, or both, of the stated occasions; and that she was thus murdered by her husband. The next paragraph asserted, that the said Eustace Macallan, taken before John Daviot, Esquire, advocate, sheriff-substitute of Mid-Lothian, did in his presence at Edinburgh (on a given date—viz. :—the 29th of October), subscribe a Declaration stating his innocence of the alleged crime : this Declaration being reserved in the Indictment—together with certain Documents, papers, and articles, enumerated in an Inventory—to be used in evidence against the prisoner. The Indictment concluded by declaring that, in the event of the offence charged against the prisoner being found proven by the Verdict, he, the said Eustace Macallan, ‘ought to be punished with the pains of the law, to deter others from committing the like crimes in all time coming.’

So much for the Indictment ! I have done with it—and I am rejoiced to have done with it.

An Inventory of papers, documents, and articles followed at great length, on the three next pages. This, in its turn, was succeeded by the list of the witnesses, and by the names of the jurors (fifteen in number) balloted for, to try the case. And then, at last, the Report of the Trial began. It resolved itself, to my mind, into three great Questions. As it appeared to me at the time, so let me present it here.

## CHAPTER XVI.

FIRST QUESTION—DID THE WOMAN DIE  
POISONED ?

THE proceedings began at ten o'clock. The prisoner was placed at the Bar, before the High Court of Justiciary, at Edinburgh. He bowed respectfully to the Bench, and pleaded Not Guilty, in a low voice.

It was observed by everyone present, that the prisoner's face betrayed the traces of acute mental suffering. He was deadly pale. His eyes never once wandered to the crowd in the Court. When certain witnesses appeared against him, he looked at them with a momentary attention. At other times, he kept his eyes on the ground. When the evidence touched on his wife's illness and death, he was deeply affected,

and covered his face with his hands. It was a subject of general remark and general surprise, that the prisoner, in this case (although a man), showed far less self-possession than the last prisoner tried in that Court for murder—a woman, who had been convicted on overwhelming evidence. There were persons present (a small minority only) who considered this want of composure on the part of the prisoner to be a sign in his favour. Self-possession, in his dreadful position, signified to their minds, the stark insensibility of a heartless and shameless criminal, and afforded in itself a presumption—not of innocence—but of guilt.

The first witness called was John Daviot, Esquire, Sheriff-Substitute of Mid-Lothian. He was examined by the Lord Advocate (as counsel for the prosecution); and said :

‘ The prisoner was brought before me on the present charge. He made, and subscribed, a Declaration, on the 29th of October. It was freely and voluntarily

made ; the prisoner having been first duly warned and admonished.'

Having identified the Declaration, the Sheriff-Substitute—being cross-examined by the Dean of Faculty (as counsel for the defence)—continued his evidence in these words :

' The charge against the prisoner was, Murder. This was communicated to him before he made the Declaration. The questions addressed to the prisoner were put, partly by me, partly by another officer, the Procurator-Fiscal. The answers were given distinctly, and, so far as I could judge, without reserve. The statements put forward in the Declaration, were all made in answer to questions asked by the Procurator-Fiscal or by myself.'

A clerk in the Sheriff-Clerk's office then officially produced the Declaration, and corroborated the evidence of the witness who had preceded him.

The appearance of the next witness created a marked sensation in the Court. This was no less a person than the nurse



who had attended Mrs. Macallan in her last illness—by name, Christina Ormsay.

After the first formal answers, the nurse (examined by the Lord Advocate) proceeded to say :

‘ I was first sent for, to attend the deceased lady, on the seventh of October. She was then suffering from a severe cold, accompanied by a rheumatic affection of the left knee-joint. Previous to this, I understood that her health had been fairly good. She was not a very difficult person to nurse, when you got used to her, and understood how to manage her. The main difficulty was caused by her temper. She was not a sullen person ; she was headstrong and violent—easily excited to fly into a passion, and quite reckless, in her fits of anger, as to what she said or did. At such times, I really hardly think she knew what she was about. My own idea is, that her temper was made still more irritable by unhappiness in her married life. She was far from being a reserved person. Indeed, she was disposed (as I

thought) to be a little too communicative about herself and her troubles, with persons, like me, who were beneath her in station. She did not scruple, for instance, to tell me (when we had been long enough together to get used to each other) that she was very unhappy, and fretted a good deal about her husband. One night, when she was wakeful and restless, she said to me——’

The Dean of Faculty here interposed ; speaking on the prisoner’s behalf. He appealed to the Judges to say whether such loose and unreliable evidence as this, was evidence which could be received by the Court ?

The Lord Advocate (speaking on behalf of the Crown) claimed it as his right to produce the evidence. It was of the utmost importance, in this case, to show (on the testimony of an unprejudiced witness) on what terms the husband and wife were living. The witness was a most respectable woman. She had won, and deserved, the confidence of the unhappy

lady whom she attended on her death-bed.

After briefly consulting together, the Judges unanimously decided that the evidence could not be admitted. What the witness had herself seen and observed of the relations between the husband and wife, was the only evidence that they could receive.

The Lord Advocate thereupon continued his examination of the witness. Christina Ormsay resumed her evidence as follows :

‘ My position as nurse led necessarily to my seeing more of Mrs. Macallan than any other person in the house. I am able to speak, from experience, of many things not known to others who were only in her room at intervals.

‘ For instance, I had more than one opportunity of personally observing that Mr. and Mrs. Macallan did not live together very happily. I can give you an example of this, not drawn from what others told me, but from what I noticed for myself.

‘Towards the latter part of my attendance on Mrs. Macallan, a young widow lady, named Mrs. Beaully—a cousin of Mr. Macallan’s—came to stay at Gleninch. Mrs. Macallan was jealous of this lady; and she showed it, in my presence, only the day before her death, when Mr. Macallan came into her room to enquire how she had passed the night. “Oh,” she said, “never mind how *I* have slept! What do you care whether I sleep well or ill? How has Mrs. Beaully passed the night? Is she more beautiful than ever this morning? Go back to her—pray go back to her! Don’t waste your time with me.” Beginning in that manner, she worked herself into one of her furious rages. I was brushing her hair at the time; and, feeling that my presence was an impropriety under the circumstances, I attempted to leave the room. She forbade me to go. Mr. Macallan felt, as I did, that my duty was to withdraw; and he said so in plain words. Mrs. Macallan insisted on my staying, in language so insolent to

her husband that he said, "If you cannot control yourself, either the nurse leaves the room or I do." She refused to yield even then. "A good excuse," she said, "for getting back to Mrs. Beaulieu. Go!" He took her at her word, and walked out of the room. He had barely closed the door, before she began reviling him to me in the most shocking manner. She declared, among other things she said of him, that the news of all others which he would be glad to hear would be the news of her death. I ventured, quite respectfully, on remonstrating with her. She took up the hairbrush, and threw it at me—and, then and there, dismissed me from my attendance on her. I left her ; and waited below until her fit of passion had worn itself out. Then I returned to my place at the bedside, and, for a while, things went on again as usual.

'It may not be amiss to add a word which may help to explain Mrs. Macallan's jealousy of her husband's cousin. Mrs. Macallan was a very plain woman. She

had a cast in one of her eyes, and (if I may use the expression) one of the most muddy, blotchy complexions it was ever my misfortune to see in a person's face. Mrs. Beauily, on the other hand, was a most attractive lady. Her eyes were universally admired; and she had a most beautifully clear and delicate colour. Poor Mrs. Macallan said of her, most untruly, that she painted.

‘No; the defects in the complexion of the deceased lady were not in any way attributable to her illness. I should call them born and bred defects in herself.

‘Her illness, if I am asked to describe it, I should say was troublesome—nothing more. Until the last day, there were no symptoms in the least degree serious about the malady that had taken her. Her rheumatic knee was painful, of course, acutely painful if you like, when she moved it; and the confinement to bed was irksome enough, no doubt. But otherwise there was nothing in the lady's condition, before the fatal attack came, to alarm her or anybody about her. She had her books, and her

writing-materials, on an invalid table which worked on a pivot, and could be arranged in any position most agreeable to her. At times, she read and wrote a great deal. At other times, she lay quiet, thinking her own thoughts, or talking with me and with one or two lady friends in the neighbourhood who came regularly to see her.

‘Her writing, so far as I knew, was almost entirely of the poetical sort. She was a great hand at composing poetry. On one occasion only, she showed me some of her poems. I am no judge of such things. Her poetry was of the dismal kind; despairing about herself, and wondering why she had ever been born, and nonsense like that. Her husband came in more than once for some hard hits at his cruel heart and his ignorance of his wife’s merits. In short, she vented her discontent with her pen as well as with her tongue. There were times—and pretty often too—when an angel from heaven would have failed to have satisfied Mrs. Macallan.

‘Throughout the period of her illness

the deceased lady occupied the same room—a large bedroom situated (like all the best bedrooms) on the first floor of the house.

‘Yes : the plan of the room now shown to me is quite accurately taken, according to my remembrance of it. One door led into the great passage, or corridor, on which all the doors opened. A second door, at one side, (marked B on the plan), led into Mr. Macallan’s sleeping room. A third door, on the opposite side (marked C on the plan), communicated with a little study or book-room, used, as I was told, by Mr. Macallan’s mother when she was staying at Gleninch, but seldom or never entered by anyone else. Mr. Macallan’s mother was not at Gleninch while I was there. The door between the bedroom and this study was locked, and the key was taken out. I don’t know who had the key, or whether there were more keys than one in existence. The door was never opened, to my knowledge. I only got into the study, to look at it along with the housekeeper, by entering through a second door that opened on to the corridor.



‘I beg to say that I can speak, from my own knowledge, positively about Mrs. Macallan’s illness, and about the sudden change which ended in her death. By the doctor’s advice, I made notes, at the time, of dates and hours, and such like. I looked at my notes before coming here.

‘From the seventh of October, when I was first called in to nurse her, to the twentieth of the same month, she slowly, but steadily, improved in health. Her knee was still painful, no doubt; but the inflammatory look of it was disappearing. As to the other symptoms, except weakness from lying in bed, and irritability of temper, there was really nothing the matter with her. She slept badly, I ought perhaps to add. But we remedied this, by means of composing-draughts, prescribed for that purpose by the doctor.

‘On the morning of the twenty-first, at a few minutes past six, I got my first alarm that something was going wrong with Mrs. Macallan.

‘I was woke, at the time I have men-

tioned, by the ringing of the hand-bell which she kept on her bed-table. Let me say for myself that I had only fallen asleep on the sofa in the bedroom, at past two in the morning, from sheer fatigue. Mrs. Macallan was then awake. She was in one of her bad humours with me. I had tried to prevail on her to let me remove her dressing-case from her bed-table, after she had used it in making her toilet for the night. It took up a great deal of room ; and she could not possibly want it again before the morning. But no—she insisted on my letting it be. There was a glass inside the case ; and, plain as she was, she never wearied of looking at herself in that glass ! I saw that she was in a bad state of temper, so I gave her her way, and let the dressing-case be. Finding that she was too sullen to speak to me after that, and too obstinate to take her composing-draught from me when I offered it, I laid me down on the sofa at her bed-foot, and fell asleep, as I have said.

‘ The moment her bell rang, I was up

and at the bedside, ready to make myself useful.

‘I asked what was the matter with her. She complained of faintness and depression, and said she felt sick. I enquired if she had taken anything in the way of physic or food while I had been asleep. She answered that her husband had come in about an hour since, and, finding her still sleepless, had himself administered the composing-draught. Mr. Macallan (sleeping in the next room) joined us while she was speaking. He, too, had been aroused by the bell. He heard what Mrs. Macallan said to me about the composing-draught, and made no remark upon it. It seemed to me that he was alarmed at his wife’s faintness. I suggested that she should take a little wine, or brandy-and-water. She answered that she could swallow nothing so strong as wine or brandy, having a burning pain in her stomach already. I put my hand on her stomach—quite lightly. She screamed when I touched her.

‘ This symptom alarmed us. We sent to the village for the medical man who had attended Mrs. Macallan during her illness : one Mr. Gale.

‘ The doctor seemed no better able to account for the change for the worse in his patient than we were. Hearing her complain of thirst, he gave her some milk. Not long after taking it, she was sick. The sickness appeared to relieve her. She soon grew drowsy, and slumbered. Mr. Gale left us, with strict injunctions to send for him instantly if she was taken ill again.

‘ Nothing of the sort happened ; no change took place for the next three hours or more. She roused up towards half-past nine, and enquired about her husband. I informed her that he had returned to his own room, and asked if I should send for him. She said, “ No.” I asked next, if she would like anything to eat or drink. She said, “ No,” again, in rather a vacant, stupefied way—and then told me to go downstairs and get my breakfast. On my way down, I met the housekeeper. She in-

vited me to breakfast with her in her room, instead of in the servants' hall as usual. I remained with the housekeeper but a short time : certainly not more than half an hour.

‘ Going upstairs again, I met the under-housemaid, sweeping, on one of the landings.

‘ The girl informed me that Mrs. Macallan had taken a cup of tea, during my absence in the housekeeper's room. Mr. Macallan's valet had ordered the tea for his mistress, by his master's directions. The under-housemaid made it, and took it upstairs herself to Mrs. Macallan's room. Her master (she said) opened the door, when she knocked, and took the teacup from her with his own hand. He opened the door widely enough for her to see into the bedroom, and to notice that nobody was with Mrs. Macallan but himself.

‘ After a little talk with the under-housemaid, I returned to the bedroom. No one was there. Mrs. Macallan was lying perfectly quiet, with her face turned away from me on the pillow. Approach-

ing the bedside, I kicked against something on the floor. It was a broken teacup. I said to Mrs. Macallan, "How comes the teacup to be broken, ma'am?" She answered, without turning towards me—in an odd, muffled kind of voice—"I dropped it." "Before you drank your tea, ma'am?" I asked. "No," she said; "in handing the cup back to Mr. Macallan after I had done." I had put my question, wishing to know—in case she had spilt the tea when she dropped the cup—whether it would be necessary to get her any more. I am quite sure I remember correctly my question, and her answer. I enquired next if she had been long alone. She said, shortly, "Yes; I have been trying to sleep." I said, "Do you feel pretty comfortable?" She answered "Yes," again. All this time, she still kept her face sulkily turned from me towards the wall. Stooping over her to arrange the bed-clothes, I looked towards her table. The writing materials which were always kept on it, were disturbed; and there was wet ink on one of the pens.

I said, "Surely you haven't been writing, ma'am?" "Why not?" she said; "I couldn't sleep." "Another poem?" I asked. She laughed to herself—a bitter, short laugh. "Yes," she said; "another poem." "That's good," I said; "it looks as if you were getting quite like yourself again. We shan't want the doctor any more to-day." She made no answer to this, except an impatient sign with her hand. I didn't understand the sign. Upon that, she spoke again—and crossly enough, too! "I want to be alone; leave me."

'I had no choice but to do as I was told. To the best of my observation, there was nothing the matter with her, and nothing for the nurse to do. I put the bell-rope within reach of her hand, and I went downstairs again.

'Half an hour more, as well as I can guess it, passed. I kept within hearing of the bell; but it never rang. I was not quite at my ease—without exactly knowing why. That odd muffled voice in which she had spoken to me hung on my mind, as it

were. I was not quite satisfied about leaving her alone for too long a time together—and then, again, I was unwilling to risk throwing her into one of her fits of passion by going back before she rang for me. It ended in my venturing into the room on the ground floor, called the Morning Room, to consult Mr. Macallan. He was usually to be found there in the forenoon of the day.

‘On this occasion, however, when I looked into the Morning Room it was empty.

‘At the same moment, I heard the master’s voice on the terrace outside. I went out, and found him speaking to one Mr. Dexter, an old friend of his, and (like Mrs. Beaully) a guest staying in the house. Mr. Dexter was sitting at the window of his room upstairs (he was a cripple, and could only move himself about in a chair on wheels); and Mr. Macallan was speaking to him from the terrace below.

“Dexter!” I heard Mr. Macallan say. “Where is Mrs. Beaully? Have you seen anything of her?”



‘ Mr. Dexter answered, in his quick, off-hand way of speaking, “ Not I ! I know nothing about her.”

‘ Then I advanced, and, begging pardon for intruding, I mentioned to Mr. Macallan the difficulty I was in about going back or not to his wife’s room, without waiting until she rang for me. Before he could advise me in the matter, the footman made his appearance, and informed me that Mrs. Macallan’s bell was then ringing—and ringing violently.

‘ It was close on eleven o’clock. As fast as I could mount the stairs, I hastened back to the bedroom.

‘ Before I opened the door, I heard Mrs. Macallan groaning. She was in dreadful pain ; feeling a burning heat in the stomach, and in the throat ; together with the same sickness which had troubled her in the early morning. Though no doctor, I could see in her face that this second attack was of a far more serious nature than the first. After ringing the bell for a messenger to send to Mr. Macallan, I ran

to the door to see if any of the servants happened to be within call.

‘ The only person I saw in the corridor was Mrs. Beauly. She was on her way from her own room, she said, to enquire after Mrs. Macallan’s health. I said to her, “ Mrs. Macallan is seriously ill again, ma’am. Would you please tell Mr. Macallan, and send for the doctor ? ” She ran downstairs at once to do as I told her.

‘ I had not been long back at the bedside when Mr. Macallan and Mrs. Beauly both came in together. Mrs. Macallan cast a strange look on them (a look I cannot at all describe), and made them leave her. Mrs. Beauly, looking very much frightened, withdrew immediately. Mr. Macallan advanced a step or two nearer to the bed. His wife looked at him again, in the same strange way, and cried out—half as if she was threatening him, half as if she was entreating him—“ Leave me with the nurse. Go ! ” He only waited to say to me in a whisper, “ The doctor is sent for ”—and then he left the room.

‘ Before Mr. Gale arrived, Mrs. Macallan was violently sick. What came from her was muddy and frothy, and faintly streaked with blood. When Mr. Gale saw it, he looked very serious ; I heard him say to himself, “ What does this mean ? ” He did his best to relieve Mrs. Macallan, but with no good result that I could see. After a time, she seemed to suffer less. Then more sickness came on. Then there was another intermission. Whether she was suffering or not, I observed that her hands and feet (whenever I touched them) remained equally cold. Also, the doctor’s report of her pulse was always the same—“ very small and feeble.” I said to Mr. Gale, “ What is to be done, sir ? ” And Mr. Gale said to me, “ I won’t take the responsibility on myself any longer ; I must have a physician from Edinburgh.”

‘ The fastest horse in the stables at Gleninch was put into a dog-cart ; and the coachman drove away full speed to Edinburgh, to fetch the famous Doctor Jerome.

‘ While we were waiting for the physi-

cian, Mr. Macallan came into his wife's room, with Mr. Gale. Exhausted as she was, she instantly lifted her hand, and signed to him to leave her. He tried by soothing words to persuade her to let him stay. No! She still insisted on sending him out of her room. He seemed to feel it—at such a time, and in the presence of the doctor. Before she was aware of him, he suddenly stepped up to the bedside, and kissed her on the forehead. She shrank from him with a scream. Mr. Gale interfered, and led him out of the room.

‘ In the afternoon, Dr. Jerome arrived.

‘ The great physician came just in time to see her seized with another attack of sickness. He watched her attentively, without speaking a word. In the interval when the sickness stopped, he still studied her, as it were, in perfect silence. I thought he would never have done examining her. When he was at last satisfied, he told me to leave him alone with Mr. Gale. “ We will ring,” he said, “ when we want you here again.”

‘It was a long time before they rang for me. The coachman was sent for, before I was summoned back to the bedroom. He was despatched to Edinburgh, for the second time, with a written message from Doctor Jerome to his head-servant, saying that there was no chance of his returning to the city, and to his patients, for some hours to come. Some of us thought this looked badly for Mrs. Macallan. Others said it might mean that the doctor had hopes of saving her, but expected to be a long time in doing it.

‘At last I was sent for. On my presenting myself in the bedroom, Doctor Jerome went out to speak to Mr. Macallan, leaving Mr. Gale along with me. From that time, as long as the poor lady lived, I was never left alone with her. One of the two doctors was always in her room. Refreshments were prepared for them ; but still they took it in turns to eat their meal—one relieving the other at the bedside. If they had administered remedies to their patient I should not have been surprised by this pro-

ceeding. But they were at the end of their remedies ; their only business in the room seemed to be to keep watch. I was puzzled to account for this. Keeping watch was the nurse's business. I thought the conduct of the doctors very strange.

‘ By the time that the lamp was lit in the sick room, I could see that the end was near. Excepting an occasional feeling of cramp in her legs, she seemed to suffer less. But her eyes looked sunk in her head ; her skin was cold and clammy ; her lips had turned to a bluish paleness. Nothing roused her now—excepting the last attempt made by her husband to see her. He came in with Dr. Jerome, looking like a man terror-struck. She was past speaking ; but the moment she saw him, she feebly made signs and sounds which showed that she was just as resolved as ever not to let him come near her. He was so overwhelmed that Mr. Gale was obliged to help him out of the room. No other person was allowed to see the patient. Mr. Dexter and Mrs.

Beaully made their enquiries outside the door, and were not invited in. As the evening drew on, the doctors sat on either side of the bed, silently watching her, silently waiting for her death.

‘Towards eight o’clock, she seemed to have lost the use of her hands and arms; they lay helpless outside the bedclothes. A little later, she sank into a sort of dull sleep. Little by little, the sound of her heavy breathing grew fainter. At twenty minutes past nine, Doctor Jerome told me to bring the lamp to the bedside. He looked at her, and put his hand on her heart. Then he said to me, “You can go downstairs, nurse: it is all over.” He turned to Mr. Gale. “Will you enquire if Mr. Macallan can see us?” he said. I opened the door for Mr. Gale, and followed him out. Doctor Jerome called me back for a moment, and told me to give him the key of the door. I did so, of course—but I thought this also very strange. When I got down to the servants’ hall, I found there

was a general feeling that something was wrong. We were all uneasy—without knowing why.

‘A little later the two doctors left the house. Mr. Macallan had been quite incapable of receiving them, and hearing what they had to say. In this difficulty, they had spoken privately with Mr. Dexter, as Mr. Macallan’s old friend, and the only gentleman then staying at Gleninch.

‘Before bedtime I went upstairs, to prepare the remains of the deceased lady for the coffin. The room in which she lay was locked; the door leading into Mr. Macallan’s room being secured, as well as the door leading into the corridor. The keys had been taken away by Mr. Gale. Two of the men-servants were posted outside the bedroom to keep watch. They were to be relieved at four in the morning—that was all they could tell me.

‘In the absence of any explanations or directions, I took the liberty of knocking at the door of Mr. Dexter’s room. From his lips I first heard the startling news.



Both the doctors had refused to give the usual certificate of death! There was to be a medical examination of the body the next morning.'

There the examination of the nurse, Christina Ormsay, came to an end.

Ignorant as I was of the law, I could see what impression the evidence (so far) was intended to produce on the minds of the Jury. After first showing that my husband had had two opportunities of administering the poison—once in the medicine and once in the tea—the counsel for the Crown led the Jury to infer that the prisoner had taken those opportunities to rid himself of an ugly and jealous wife whose detestable temper he could no longer endure.

Having directed his examination to the attainment of this object, the Lord Advocate had done with the witness. The Dean of Faculty—acting in the prisoner's interests—then rose to bring out the favourable side of the wife's character by cross-examin-

ing the nurse. If he succeeded in this attempt, the Jury might reconsider their conclusion that the wife was a person who had exasperated her husband beyond endurance. In that case, where (so far) was the husband's motive for poisoning her? and where was the presumption of the prisoner's guilt?

Pressed by this skilful lawyer, the nurse was obliged to exhibit my husband's first wife under an entirely new aspect. Here is the substance of what the Dean of Faculty extracted from Christina Ormsay :

‘I persist in declaring that Mrs. Macallan had a most violent temper. But she was certainly in the habit of making amends for the offence that she gave by her violence. When she was quiet again, she always made her excuses to me; and she made them with a good grace. Her manners were engaging at such times as these. She spoke and acted like a well-bred lady. Then again, as to her personal appearance. Plain as she was in face, she had a good figure; her hands and feet, I

was told, had been modelled by a sculptor. She had a very pleasant voice; and she was reported when in health to sing beautifully. She was also (if her maid's account was to be trusted) a pattern, in the matter of dressing, for the other ladies in the neighbourhood. Then, as to Mrs. Beaully, though she was certainly jealous of the beautiful young widow, she had shown at the same time that she was capable of controlling that feeling. It was through Mrs. Macallan that Mrs. Beaully was in the house. Mrs. Beaully had wished to postpone her visit, on account of the state of Mrs. Macallan's health. It was Mrs. Macallan herself—not her husband—who decided that Mrs. Beaully should not be disappointed, and should pay her visit to Gleninch, then and there. Further, Mrs. Macallan (in spite of her temper) was popular with her friends, and popular with her servants. There was hardly a dry eye in the house when it was known she was dying. And, further still, in those little domestic disagreements at

which the nurse had been present, Mr. Macallan had never lost his temper, and had never used harsh language : he seemed to be more sorry than angry when the quarrels took place.'—Moral for the Jury : Was this the sort of woman who would exasperate a man into poisoning her ? And was this the sort of man who would be capable of poisoning his wife ?

Having produced that salutary counter-impression, the Dean of Faculty sat down ; and the medical witnesses were called next.

Here, the evidence was simply irresistible.

Doctor Jerome and Mr. Gale positively swore that the symptoms of the illness were the symptoms of poisoning by arsenic. The surgeon who had performed the post-mortem examination followed. He positively swore that the appearance of the internal organs proved Dr. Jerome and Mr. Gale to be right in declaring that their patient had died poisoned. Lastly, to complete this overwhelming testimony,

two analytical chemists actually produced in Court the arsenic which they had found in the body, in a quantity admittedly sufficient to have killed two persons instead of one. In the face of such evidence as this, cross-examination was a mere form. The first Question raised by the Trial—Did the Woman Die Poisoned?—was answered in the affirmative, and answered beyond the possibility of doubt.

The next witnesses called were witnesses concerned with the question that now followed—the obscure and terrible question: Who Poisoned Her?

## CHAPTER XVII.

## SECOND QUESTION—WHO POISONED HER?

THE evidence of the doctors and the chemists closed the proceedings, on the first day of the Trial.

On the second day, the evidence to be produced by the prosecution, was anticipated with a general feeling of curiosity and interest. The Court was now to hear what had been seen and done, by the persons officially appointed to verify such cases of suspected crime as the case which had occurred at Gleninch. The Procurator-Fiscal—being the person officially appointed to direct the preliminary investigations of the Law—was the first witness called, on the second day of the Trial.

Examined by the Lord Advocate, the Fiscal gave his evidence, as follows :

‘ On the twenty-sixth of October, I received a communication from Doctor Jerome of Edinburgh, and from Mr. Alexander Gale, medical practitioner, residing in the village or hamlet of Dingdovie, near Edinburgh. The communication related to the death, under circumstances of suspicion, of Mrs. Eustace Macallan, at her husband’s house, hard by Dingdovie, called Gleninch. There was also forwarded to me, enclosed in the document just mentioned, two reports. One described the results of a post-mortem examination of the deceased lady ; and the other stated the discoveries made, after a chemical analysis of certain of the interior organs of her body. The result, in both instances, proved to demonstration that Mrs. Eustace Macallan had died of poisoning by arsenic.

‘ Under these circumstances, I set in motion a search and enquiry in the house at Gleninch, and elsewhere, simply for the purpose of throwing light on the circum-

stances which had attended the lady's death.

‘No criminal charge, in connection with the death, was made at my office against any person, either in the communication which I received from the medical men, or in any other form. The investigations at Gleninch, and elsewhere, beginning on the twenty-sixth of October, were not completed until the twenty-eighth. Upon this latter date—acting on certain discoveries which were reported to me, and on my own examination of letters and other documents brought to my office—I made a criminal charge against the prisoner; and obtained a warrant for his apprehension. He was examined before the Sheriff, on the twenty-ninth of October, and was committed for Trial before this Court.’

The Fiscal having made his statement, and having been cross-examined (on technical matters only), the persons employed in his office were called next. These men had a story of startling interest to tell. Theirs were the fatal discoveries which



had justified the Fiscal in charging my husband with the murder of his wife. The first of the witnesses was a sheriff's officer. He gave his name as Isaiah Schoolcraft.

Examined by Mr. Drew—Advocate-Depute, and counsel for the Crown with the Lord Advocate—Isaiah Schoolcraft said :

‘ I got a warrant on the twenty-sixth of October, to go to the country house near Edinburgh, called Gleninch. I took with me Robert Lorrie, Assistant to the Fiscal. We first examined the room in which Mrs. Eustace Macallan had died. On the bed, and on a moveable table which was attached to it, we found books and writing materials, and a paper containing some unfinished verses in manuscript; afterwards identified as being in the handwriting of the deceased. We enclosed these articles in paper, and sealed them up.

‘ We next opened an Indian cabinet in the bedroom. Here we found many more

verses, on many more sheets of paper, in the same handwriting. We also discovered, first, some letters—and next a crumpled piece of paper thrown aside in a corner of one of the shelves. On closer examination, a chemist's printed label was discovered on this morsel of paper. We also found in the folds of it a few scattered grains of some white powder. The paper and the letters were carefully enclosed, and sealed up as before.

‘Further investigation in the room revealed nothing which could throw any light on the purpose of our enquiry. We examined the clothes, jewellery, and books of the deceased. These we left under lock and key. We also found her dressing-case, which we protected by seals, and took away with us to the Fiscal's office, along with all the other articles that we had discovered in the room.

‘The next day we continued our examination in the house; having received, in the interval, fresh instructions from the Fiscal. We began our work in the bed-

room communicating with the room in which Mrs. Macallan had died. It had been kept locked since the death. Finding nothing of any importance here, we went next to another room on the same floor, in which we were informed the prisoner was then lying, ill in bed.

‘ His illness was described to us as a nervous complaint, caused by the death of his wife, and by the proceedings which had followed it. He was reported to be quite incapable of exerting himself, and quite unfit to see strangers. We insisted nevertheless (in deference to our instructions) on obtaining admission to his room. He made no reply, when we enquired whether he had, or had not, removed anything from the sleeping-room next to his late wife’s which he usually occupied, to the sleeping-room in which he now lay. All he did was to close his eyes, as if he was too feeble to speak to us or to notice us. Without further disturbing him, we began to examine the room and the different objects in it.

‘While we were so employed, we were interrupted by a strange sound. We likened it to the rumbling of wheels in the corridor outside.

‘The door opened, and there came swiftly in a gentleman—a cripple—wheeling himself along in a chair. He wheeled his chair straight up to a little table which stood by the prisoner’s bedside, and said something to him in a whisper too low to be overheard. The prisoner opened his eyes, and quickly answered by a sign. We informed the crippled gentleman, quite respectfully, that we could not allow him to be in the room at this time. He appeared to think nothing of what we said. He only answered, “My name is Dexter. I am one of Mr. Macallan’s old friends. It is you who are intruding here ; not I.” We again notified to him that he must leave the room ; and we pointed out particularly that he had got his chair in such a position against the bedside-table as to prevent us from examining it. He only laughed. “Can’t you see for yourselves,” he said ;

“that it is a table, and nothing more?” In reply to this, we warned him that we were acting under a legal warrant, and that he might get into trouble if he obstructed us in the execution of our duty. Finding there was no moving him by fair means, I took his chair and pulled it away, while Robert Lorrie laid hold of the table and carried it to the other end of the room. The crippled gentleman flew into a furious rage with me for presuming to touch his chair. “My chair is Me,” he said: “how dare you lay hands on Me?” I first opened the door; and then, by way of accommodating him, gave the chair a good push behind with my stick, instead of my hand—and so sent It, and him, safely and swiftly out of the room.

‘ Having locked the door, so as to prevent any further intrusion, I joined Robert Lorrie in examining the bedside-table. It had one drawer in it, and that drawer we found secured.

‘ We asked the prisoner for the key.

‘ He flatly refused to give it to us, and

said we had no right to unlock his drawers. He was so angry that he even declared it was lucky for us he was too weak to rise from his bed. I answered civilly that our duty obliged us to examine the drawer, and that, if he still declined to produce the key, he would only oblige us to take the table away and have the lock opened by a smith.

‘While we were still disputing, there was a knock at the door of the room.

‘I opened the door cautiously. Instead of the crippled gentleman, whom I had expected to see again, there was another stranger standing outside. The prisoner hailed him as a friend and neighbour, and eagerly called upon him for protection from us. We found this second gentleman pleasant enough to deal with. He informed us readily that he had been sent for by Mr. Dexter, and that he was himself a lawyer—and he asked to see our warrant. Having looked at it, he at once informed the prisoner (evidently very much to the prisoner’s surprise) that he must submit to

have the drawer examined—under protest. And then, without more ado, he got the key, and opened the table drawer for us himself.

‘We found inside several letters, and a large book, with a lock to it; having the words “My Diary” inscribed on it in gilt letters. As a matter of course, we took possession of the letters and the Diary, and sealed them up to be given to the Fiscal. At the same time, the gentleman wrote out a protest, on the prisoner’s behalf, and handed us his card. The card informed us that he was Mr. Playmore—now one of the agents for the prisoner. The card and the protest were deposited, with the other documents, in the care of the Fiscal. No other discoveries of any importance were made at Gleninch.

‘Our next enquiries took us to Edinburgh—to the druggist whose label we had found on the crumpled morsel of paper, and to other druggists likewise whom we were instructed to question. On the twenty-eighth of October, the Fiscal was

in possession of all the information that we could collect, and our duties for the time being came to an end.'

This concluded the evidence of Schoolcraft and Lorrie. It was not shaken on cross-examination; and it was plainly unfavourable to the prisoner.

Matters grew worse still when the next witnesses were called. The druggist whose label had been found on the crumpled bit of paper now appeared on the stand, to make the position of my unhappy husband more critical than ever.

Andrew Kinlay, druggist, of Edinburgh, deposed as follows :

'I keep a special registry-book of the poisons sold by me. I produce the book. On the date therein mentioned, the prisoner at the bar, Mr. Eustace Macallan, came into my shop, and said that he wished to purchase some arsenic. I asked him what it was wanted for? He told me it was wanted by his gardener, to be used, in solution, for the killing of insects in the greenhouse. At the same time he men-



tioned his name—Mr. Macallan, of Gleninch. I at once directed my assistant to put up the arsenic (two ounces of it); and I made the necessary entry in my book. Mr. Macallan signed the entry; and I signed it afterwards as witness. He paid for the arsenic, and took it away with him wrapped up in two papers—the outer wrapper being labelled with my name and address, and with the word “Poison” in large letters; exactly like the label now produced on the piece of paper found at Gleninch.’

The next witness, Peter Stockdale (also a druggist of Edinburgh), followed, and said :

‘The prisoner at the bar called at my shop, on the date indicated on my register—some days later than the date indicated in the register of Mr. Kinlay. He wished to purchase sixpenny-worth of arsenic. My assistant, to whom he had addressed himself, called me. It is a rule in my shop that no one sells poisons but myself. I asked the prisoner what he wanted the

arsenic for. He answered that he wanted it for killing rats at his house called Gleninch. I said, "Have I the honour of speaking to Mr. Macallan, of Gleninch?" He said that was his name. I sold him the arsenic—about an ounce and a half—and labelled the bottle in which I put it with the word "Poison," in my own handwriting. He signed the Register, and took the arsenic away with him, after paying for it.'

The cross-examination of these two men succeeded in asserting certain technical objections to their evidence. But the terrible fact that my husband himself had actually purchased the arsenic, in both cases, remained unshaken.

The next witnesses—the gardener, and the cook, at Gleninch—wound the chain of hostile evidence round the prisoner more mercilessly still.

On examination, the gardener said, on his oath :

'I never received any arsenic from the prisoner or from anyone else, at the date

to which you refer, or at any other date. I never used any such thing as a solution of arsenic, or ever allowed the men working under me to use it, in the conservatories, or in the garden, at Gleninch. I disapprove of arsenic as a means of destroying noxious insects infesting flowers and plants.'

The cook, being called next, spoke as positively as the gardener.

'Neither my master, nor any other person, gave me any arsenic to destroy rats, at any time. No such thing was wanted. I declare, on my oath, that I never saw any rats, in, or about, the house—or ever heard of any rats infesting it.'

Other household servants at Gleninch gave similar evidence. Nothing could be extracted from them on cross-examination—except that there might have been rats in the house, though they were not aware of it. The possession of the poison was traced directly to my husband, and to no one else. That he had bought it was actually proved; and that he had kept it,

was the one conclusion that the evidence justified.

The witnesses who came next did their best to press the charge against the prisoner home to him. Having the arsenic in his possession, what had he done with it? The evidence led the Jury to infer what he had done with it.

The prisoner's valet deposed that his master had rung for him at twenty minutes to ten, on the morning of the day on which his mistress died, and had ordered a cup of tea for her. The man had received the order at the open door of Mrs. Macallan's room, and could positively swear that no other person but his master was there at the time.

The under-housemaid, appearing next, said that she had made the tea, and had herself taken it upstairs, before ten o'clock, to Mrs. Macallan's room. Her master had received it from her at the open door. She could look in, and see that he was alone in her mistress's room.

The nurse, Christina Ormsay, being recalled, repeated what Mrs. Macallan had

said to her, on the day when that lady was first taken ill. She had said (speaking to the nurse at six o'clock in the morning), 'Mr. Macallan came in about an hour since; he found me still sleepless, and gave me my composing-draught.' This was at five o'clock in the morning, while Christina Ormsay was asleep on the sofa. The nurse further swore that she had looked at the bottle containing the composing-mixture, and had seen, by the measuring marks on the bottle, that a dose had been poured out since the dose previously given, administered by herself.

On this occasion, special interest was excited by the cross-examination. The closing questions, put to the under-housemaid and the nurse, revealed for the first time what the nature of the defence was to be.

Cross-examining the under-housemaid, the Dean of Faculty said:

'Did you ever notice, when you were setting Mrs. Eustace Macallan's room to rights, whether the water left in the basin was of a blackish or bluish colour?' The

witness answered, 'I never noticed anything of the sort.'

The Dean of Faculty went on :

'Did you ever find, under the pillow of the bed, or in any other hiding-place in Mrs. Macallan's room, any books or pamphlets, telling of remedies used for improving a bad complexion?' The witness answered, 'No.'

The Dean of Faculty persisted :

'Did you ever hear Mrs. Macallan speak of arsenic, taken as a wash, or taken as a medicine, as a good thing to improve the complexion?' The witness answered, 'Never.'

Similar questions were next put to the nurse, and were all answered, by this witness also, in the negative.

Here, then—in spite of the negative answers—was the plan of the defence made dimly visible for the first time to the Jury and to the audience. By way of preventing the possibility of a mistake in so serious a matter, the Chief Judge (the Lord Justice Clerk) put this plain question, when the

witnesses had retired, to the Counsel for the defence :

‘The Court and the Jury,’ said his lordship, ‘wish distinctly to understand the object of your cross-examination of the housemaid and the nurse. Is it the theory of the defence, that Mrs. Eustace Macallan used the arsenic which her husband purchased, for the purpose of improving the defects of her complexion?’

The Dean of Faculty answered :

‘That is what we say, my lord, and what we propose to prove, as the foundation of the defence. We cannot dispute the medical evidence which declares that Mrs. Macallan died poisoned. But we assert that she died of an overdose of arsenic, ignorantly taken, in the privacy of her own room, as a remedy for the defects—the proved and admitted defects—of her complexion. The prisoner’s Declaration before the Sheriff, expressly sets forth that he purchased the arsenic at the request of his wife.’

The Lord Justice Clerk enquired, upon

this, if there was any objection, on the part of either of the learned counsel, to have the Declaration read in Court, before the Trial proceeded further.

To this, the Dean of Faculty replied that he would be glad to have the Declaration read. If he might use the expression, it would usefully pave the way, in the minds of the Jury, for the defence which he had to submit to them.

The Lord Advocate (speaking on the other side) was happy to be able to accommodate his learned brother in this matter. So long as the mere assertions which the Declaration contained were not supported by proof, he looked upon that document as evidence for the prosecution, and he, too, was quite willing to have it read.

Thereupon, the prisoner's Declaration of his innocence—on being charged before the Sheriff with the murder of his wife—was read, in the following terms :

‘ I bought the two packets of arsenic, on each occasion, at my wife's own request. On the first occasion, she told me the



poison was wanted by the gardener, for use in the conservatories. On the second occasion, she said it was required by the cook for ridding the lower part of the house of rats.

‘I handed both packets of arsenic to my wife immediately on my return home. I had nothing to do with the poison, after buying it. My wife was the person who gave orders to the gardener and the cook—not I. I never held any communication with either of them.

‘I asked my wife no questions about the use of the arsenic ; feeling no interest in the subject. I never entered the conservatories for months together ; I care little about flowers. As for the rats, I left the killing of them to the cook and the other servants—just as I should have left any other part of the domestic business to the cook and the other servants.

‘My wife never told me she wanted the arsenic to improve her complexion. Surely, I should be the last person admitted to the knowledge of such a secret of her

toilet as that? I implicitly believed what she told me—viz., that the poison was wanted, for the purposes specified, by the gardener and the cook.

‘I assert positively, that I lived on friendly terms with my wife; allowing, of course, for the little occasional disagreements and misunderstandings of married life. Any sense of disappointment, in connection with my marriage, which I might have felt privately, I conceived it to be my duty, as a husband and a gentleman, to conceal from my wife. I was not only shocked and grieved by her untimely death—I was filled with fear that I had not, with all my care, behaved affectionately enough to her in her lifetime.

‘Furthermore, I solemnly declare that I know no more of how she took the arsenic found in her body than the babe unborn. I am innocent even of the thought of harming that unhappy woman. I administered the composing-draught, exactly as I found it in the bottle. I afterwards gave her the cup of tea, exactly as I received it

from the under-housemaid's hand. I never had access to the arsenic, after I placed the two packages in my wife's possession. I am entirely ignorant of what she did with them, or of where she kept them. I declare, before God, I am innocent of the horrible crime with which I am charged.'

With the reading of those true and touching words, the proceedings on the second day of the Trial came to an end.

So far, I must own, the effect on me of reading the Report was to depress my spirits, and to lower my hopes. The whole weight of the evidence, at the close of the second day, was against my husband. Woman, as I was, and partisan as I was, I could plainly see that.

The merciless Lord Advocate (I confess I hated him !) had proved (1) that Eustace had bought the poison ; (2) that the reason which he had given to the druggists for buying the poison was not the true reason ; (3) that he had had two opportunities of secretly administering the poison to his

wife. On the other side, what had the Dean of Faculty proved? As yet—nothing. The assertions in the prisoner's Declaration of his innocence were still, as the Lord Advocate had remarked, assertions not supported by proof. Not one atom of evidence had been produced to show that it was the wife who had secretly used the arsenic, and used it for her complexion.

My one consolation was, that the reading of the Trial had already revealed to me the helpful figures of two friends, on whose sympathy I might surely rely. The crippled Mr. Dexter had especially shown himself to be a thorough good ally of my husband's. My heart warmed to the man who had moved his chair against the bed-side-table—the man who had struggled to the last to defend Eustace's papers from the wretches who had seized them! I decided, then and there, that the first person to whom I would confide my aspirations and my hopes should be Mr. Dexter. If he felt any difficulty about advising me, I would then apply next to

the agent, Mr. Playmore—the second good friend, who had formally protested against the seizure of my husband's papers.

Fortified by this resolution, I turned the page, and read the history of the third day of the Trial.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THIRD QUESTION—WHAT WAS HIS MOTIVE?

THE first question (Did the Woman die Poisoned ?) had been answered, positively. The second question (Who Poisoned Her ?) had been answered, apparently. There now remained the third and final question—What Was His Motive? The first evidence called, in answer to that enquiry, was the evidence of relatives and friends of the dead wife.

Lady Brydehaven, widow of Rear Admiral Sir George Brydehaven, examined by Mr. Drew (counsel for the Crown with the Lord Advocate), gave evidence as follows :

‘The deceased lady (Mrs. Eustace Macallan) was my niece. She was the

only child of my sister ; and she lived under my roof after the time of her mother's death. I objected to her marriage—on grounds which were considered purely fanciful and sentimental by her other friends. It is extremely painful to me to state the circumstances in public ; but I am ready to make the sacrifice, if the ends of justice require it.

‘ The prisoner at the Bar, at the time of which I am now speaking, was staying as a guest in my house. He met with an accident, while he was out riding, which caused a severe injury to one of his legs. The leg had been previously hurt, while he was serving with the army in India. This circumstance tended greatly to aggravate the injury received in the accident. He was confined to a recumbent position on a sofa for many weeks together : and the ladies in the house took it in turns to sit with him, and wile away the weary time by reading to him and talking to him. My niece was foremost among these volunteer nurses. She played admirably on the

piano ; and the sick man happened—most unfortunately as the event proved—to be fond of music.

‘ The consequences of the perfectly innocent intercourse thus begun, were deplorable consequences for my niece. She became passionately attached to Mr. Eustace Macallan : without awakening any corresponding affection on his side.

‘ I did my best to interfere, delicately and usefully, while it was still possible to interfere with advantage. Unhappily, my niece refused to place any confidence in me. She persistently denied that she was actuated by any warmer feeling towards Mr. Macallan than a feeling of friendly interest. This made it impossible for me to separate them, without openly acknowledging my reason for doing so, and thus producing a scandal which might have affected my niece’s reputation. My husband was alive at that time ; and the one thing I could do, under the circumstances, was the thing I did. I requested him to speak privately to Mr. Macallan, and to appeal to his honour



to help us out of the difficulty, without prejudice to my niece.

‘ Mr. Macallan behaved admirably. He was still helpless. But he made an excuse for leaving us which it was impossible to dispute. In two days after my husband had spoken to him, he was removed from the house.

‘ The remedy was well intended ; but it came too late, and it utterly failed. The mischief was done. My niece pined away visibly ; neither medical help nor change of air and scene did anything for her. In course of time—after Mr. Macallan had recovered from the effects of his accident—I found out that she was carrying on a clandestine correspondence with him, by means of her maid. His letters, I am bound to say, were most considerately and carefully written. Nevertheless, I felt it my duty to stop the correspondence.

‘ My interference—what else could I do but interfere ?—brought matters to a crisis. One day, my niece was missing at breakfast time. The next day, we dis-

covered that the poor infatuated creature had gone to Mr. Macallan's chambers in London, and had been found hidden in his bedroom, by some bachelor friends who came to visit him.

‘ For this disaster Mr. Macallan was in no respect to blame. Hearing footsteps outside, he had only time to take measures for saving her character by concealing her in the nearest room—and the nearest room happened to be his bedchamber. The matter was talked about of course, and motives were misinterpreted in the vilest manner. My husband had another private conversation with Mr. Macallan. He again behaved admirably. He publicly declared that my niece had visited him as his betrothed wife. In a fortnight from that time, he silenced scandal in the one way that was possible—he married her.

‘ I was alone in opposing the marriage. I thought it at the time—what it has proved to be since—a fatal mistake.

‘ It would have been sad enough, if Mr. Macallan had only married her without a

particle of love on his side. But, to make the prospect more hopeless still, he was himself, at that very time, the victim of a misplaced attachment to a lady who was engaged to another man. I am well aware that he compassionately denied this—just as he compassionately affected to be in love with my niece when he married her. But his hopeless admiration of the lady whom I have mentioned, was a matter of fact notorious among his friends. It may not be amiss to add, that *her* marriage preceded *his* marriage. He had irretrievably lost the woman he really loved—he was without a hope or an aspiration in life—when he took pity on my niece.

‘In conclusion, I can only repeat that no evil which could have happened (if she had remained a single woman) would have been comparable, in my opinion, to the evil of such a marriage as this. Never, I sincerely believe, were two more ill-assorted persons united in the bonds of matrimony, than the prisoner at the bar and his deceased wife.’

The evidence of this witness produced a strong sensation among the audience, and had a marked effect on the minds of the Jury. Cross-examination forced Lady Brydehaven to modify some of her opinions, and to acknowledge that the hopeless attachment of the prisoner to another woman was a matter of rumour only. But the facts in her narrative remained unshaken—and, for that one reason, they invested the crime charged against the prisoner with an appearance of possibility, which it had entirely failed to assume during the earlier part of the Trial.

Two other ladies (intimate friends of Mrs. Eustace Macallan) were called next. They differed from Lady Brydehaven in their opinions on the propriety of the marriage; but on all the material points, they supported her testimony, and confirmed the serious impression which the first witness had produced on every person in Court.

The next evidence which the prosecution proposed to put in, was the silent

evidence of the letters and the Diary found at Gleninch.

In answer to a question from the Bench, the Lord Advocate stated that the letters were written by friends of the prisoner and of his deceased wife, and that passages in them bore directly on the terms on which the two associated in their married life. The Diary was still more valuable as evidence. It contained the prisoner's daily record of domestic events, and of the thoughts and feelings which they aroused in him at the time.

A most painful scene followed this explanation.

Writing, as I do, long after the events took place, I still cannot prevail upon myself to describe in detail what my unhappy husband said and did, at this distressing period of the Trial. Deeply affected while Lady Brydehaven was giving her evidence, he had with difficulty restrained himself from interrupting her. He now lost all control over his feelings. In piercing tones

which rang through the Court, he protested against the contemplated violation of his own most sacred secrets and his wife's most sacred secrets. 'Hang me, innocent as I am!' he cried, 'but spare me *that*!' The effect of this terrible outbreak on the audience, is reported to have been indescribable. Some of the women present were in hysterics. The Judges interfered from the Bench—but with no good result. Quiet was at length restored by the Dean of Faculty, who succeeded in soothing the prisoner—and who then addressed the Judges, pleading for indulgence to his unhappy client in most touching and eloquent language. The speech, a masterpiece of impromptu oratory, concluded with a temperate yet strongly-urged protest against the reading of the papers discovered at Gleninch.

The three Judges retired to consider the legal question submitted to them. The sitting was suspended for more than half an hour.

As usual in such cases, the excitement

in the Court communicated itself to the crowd outside in the street. The general opinion here—led, as it was supposed, by one of the clerks or other inferior persons connected with the legal proceedings—was decidedly adverse to the prisoner's chance of escaping a sentence of death. 'If the letters and the Diary are read,' said the brutal spokesmen of the mob, 'the letters and the Diary will hang him.'

On the return of the Judges into Court, it was announced that they had decided, by a majority of two to one, on permitting the documents in dispute to be produced in evidence. Each of the Judges, in turn, gave his reasons for the decision at which he had arrived. This done, the Trial proceeded. The reading of the extracts from the letters and the extracts from the Diary began.

The first letters produced were the letters found in the Indian cabinet, in Mrs. Eustace Macallan's room. They were addressed to the deceased lady by intimate (female) friends of hers, with whom she

was accustomed to correspond. Three separate Extracts, from letters written by three different correspondents, were selected to be read in Court.

FIRST CORRESPONDENT : ‘ I despair, my dearest Sara, of being able to tell you how your last letter has distressed me. Pray forgive me, if I own to thinking that your very sensitive nature exaggerates or misinterprets, quite unconsciously of course, the neglect that you experience at the hands of your husband. I cannot say anything about *his* peculiarities of character, because I am not well enough acquainted with him to know what they are. But, my dear, I am much older than you, and I have had a much longer experience than yours of, what somebody calls, “ the lights and shadows of married life.” Speaking from that experience, I must tell you what I have observed. Young married women, like you, who are devotedly attached to their husbands, are apt to make one very serious mistake. As a rule, they all expect too much from their husbands. Men, my



poor Sara, are not like *us*. Their love, even when it is quite sincere, is not like our love. It does not last, as it does with us. It is not the one hope and one thought of their lives, as it is with us. We have no alternative—even when we most truly respect and love them—but to make allowance for this difference between the man's nature and the woman's. I do not for one moment excuse your husband's coldness. He is wrong, for example, in never looking at you when he speaks to you, and in never noticing the efforts that you make to please him. He is worse than wrong—he is really cruel if you like—in never returning your kiss when you kiss him. But, my dear, are you quite sure that he is always *designedly* cold and cruel? May not his conduct be sometimes the result of troubles and anxieties which weigh on his mind, and which are troubles and anxieties that you cannot share? If you try to look at his behaviour in this light, you will understand many things which puzzle and pain you now. Be patient with him, my child.

Make no complaints ; and never approach him with your caresses, at times when his mind is preoccupied or his temper ruffled. This may be hard advice to follow, loving him as ardently as you do. But rely on it, the secret of happiness for us women is to be found (alas, only too often !) in such exercise of restraint and resignation as your old friend now recommends. Think, my dear, over what I have written—and let me hear from you again.'

SECOND CORRESPONDENT : 'How can you be so foolish, Sara, as to waste your love on such a cold-blooded brute as your husband seems to be ? To be sure, I am not married yet.—or perhaps I should not be so surprised at you. But I shall be married one of these days ; and if my husband ever treats me as Mr. Macallan treats you, I shall insist on a separation. I declare I think I would rather be actually beaten, like the women among the lower orders, than be treated with the polite neglect and contempt which you describe. I burn with indignation when I think of it. It must be

quite insufferable. Don't bear it any longer, my poor dear. Leave him, and come and stay with me. My brother is a law-student, as you know. I read to him portions of your letter ; and he is of opinion that you might get, what he calls, a judicial separation. Come and consult him.'

THIRD CORRESPONDENT : ' You know, my dear Mrs. Macallan, what *my* experience of men has been. Your letter does not surprise me in the least. Your husband's conduct to you points to one conclusion. He is in love with some other woman. There is Somebody in the dark, who gets from him everything that he denies to you. I have been through it all—and I know ! Don't give way. Make it the business of your life to find out who the creature is. Perhaps there may be more than one of them. It doesn't matter. One, or many, if you can only discover them, you may make his existence as miserable to him as he makes your existence to you. If you want my experience to help you, say the word, and it is freely at your

service. I can come and stay with you, at Gleninch, any time after the fourth of next month.'

With those abominable lines the readings from the letters of the women came to an end. The first and longest of the Extracts produced the most vivid impression in Court. Evidently the writer was, in this case, a worthy and sensible person. It was generally felt, however, that all three of the letters—no matter how widely they might differ in tone—justified the same conclusion. The wife's position at Gleninch (if the wife's account of it was to be trusted) was the position of a neglected and an unhappy woman.

The correspondence of the prisoner, which had been found, with his Diary, in the locked bed-table drawer, was produced next. The letters in this case were, with one exception, all written by men. Though the tone of them was moderation itself, as compared with the second and third of the women's letters, the conclusion still pointed

the same way. The life of the husband, at Gleninch, appeared to be just as intolerable as the life of the wife.

For example, one of the prisoner's male friends wrote, inviting him to make a yacht voyage round the world. Another suggested an absence of six months on the Continent. A third recommended field sports in India. The one object aimed at by all the writers was plainly to counsel a separation, more or less plausible and more or less complete, between the married pair.

The last letter read was addressed to the prisoner in a woman's handwriting, and was signed by a woman's Christian name only.

‘Ah, my poor Eustace, what a cruel destiny is ours!’ (the letter began). ‘When I think of your life, sacrificed to that wretched woman, my heart bleeds for you! If *we* had been man and wife—if it had been *my* unutterable happiness to love and cherish the best, the dearest of men—what a paradise of our own we might have lived

in, what delicious hours we might have known ! But regret is vain ; we are separated, in this life—separated by ties which we both mourn, and yet which we must both respect. My Eustace, there is a world beyond this ! There, our souls will fly to meet each other, and mingle in one long heavenly embrace—in a rapture forbidden to us on earth. The misery described in your letter—oh ! why, why did you marry her ?—has wrung this confession of feeling from me. Let it comfort you ; but let no other eyes see it. Burn my rashly-written lines, and look (as I look) to the better life which you may yet share with your own HELENA.’

The reading of this outrageous letter provoked a question from the Bench. One of the Judges asked if the writer had attached any date or address to her letter.

In answer to this, the Lord Advocate stated that neither the one nor the other appeared. The envelope showed that the letter had been posted in London. ‘We propose,’ the learned counsel conti-

nued, 'to read certain passages from the prisoner's Diary, in which the name signed at the end of the letter occurs more than once; and we may possibly find other means of identifying the writer, to the satisfaction of your lordships, before the Trial is over.'

The promised passages from my husband's private Diary were now read. The first extract related to a period of nearly a year before the date of Mrs. Eustace Macallan's death. It was expressed in these terms :

'News, by this morning's post, which has quite overwhelmed me. Helena's husband died suddenly, two days since, of heart disease. She is free—my beloved Helena is free! And I?

'I am fettered to a woman with whom I have not a single feeling in common. Helena is lost to me, by my own act. Ah! I can understand now, as I never understood before, how irresistible temptation can be, and how easily, sometimes, crime may follow it. I had better shut up these

leaves for the night. It maddens me to no purpose to think of my position or to write of it.'

The next passage, dated a few days later, dwelt on the same subject :

'Of all the follies that a man can commit, the greatest is acting on impulse. I acted on impulse when I married the unfortunate creature who is now my wife.

'Helena was then lost to me, as I too hastily supposed. She had married the man to whom she rashly engaged herself, before she met with me. He was younger than I, and, to all appearances, heartier and stronger than I. So far as I could see, my fate was sealed for life. Helena had written her farewell letter, taking leave of me in this world, for good. My prospects were closed ; my hopes had ended. I had not an aspiration left ; I had no necessity to stimulate me to take refuge in work. A chivalrous action, an exertion of noble self-denial, seemed to be all that was left to me, all that I was fit for.

'The circumstances of the moment



adapted themselves, with a fatal facility, to this idea. The ill-fated woman who had become attached to me (Heaven knows without so much as the shadow of encouragement on my part!), had, just at that time, rashly placed her reputation at the mercy of the world. It rested with me to silence the scandalous tongues that reviled her. With Helena lost to me, happiness was not to be expected. All women were equally indifferent to me. A generous action would be the salvation of *this* woman. Why not perform it? I married her on that impulse—married her, just as I might have jumped into the water and saved her, if she had been drowning; just as I might have knocked a man down, if I had seen him ill-treating her in the street!

‘ And now, the woman for whom I have made this sacrifice stands between me and my Helena—my Helena, free to pour out all the treasures of her love on the man who adores the earth that she touches with her foot!

‘ Fool! Madman! Why don’t I dash

out my brains against the wall that I see opposite to me while I write these lines ?

‘ My gun is there in the corner. I have only to tie a string to the trigger, and to put the muzzle to my mouth——No ! My mother is alive ; my mother’s love is sacred. I have no right to take the life which she gave me. I must suffer and submit. Oh, Helena ! Helena !’

The third extract—one among many similar passages—had been written about two months before the death of the prisoner’s wife.

‘ More reproaches addressed to me ! There never was such a woman for complaining ; she lives in a perfect atmosphere of ill-temper and discontent.

‘ My new offences are two in number. I never ask her to play to me now ; and, when she puts on a new dress expressly to please me, I never notice it. Notice it ! Good Heavens ! The effort of my life is *not* to notice her, in anything she does or says. How could I keep my temper, unless I kept as much as possible out of the

way of private interviews with her? And I do keep my temper. I am never hard on her; I never use harsh language to her. She has a double claim on my forbearance—she is a woman; and the law has made her my wife. I remember this; but I am human. The less I see of her—except when visitors are present—the more certain I can feel of preserving my self-control.

‘I wonder what it is that makes her so utterly distasteful to me. She is a plain woman; but I have seen uglier women than she, whose caresses I could have endured, without the sense of shrinking that comes over me when I am obliged to submit to *her* caresses. I keep the feeling hidden from her. She loves me, poor thing!—and I pity her. I wish I could do more; I wish I could return, in the smallest degree, the feeling with which she regards me. But, no—I can only pity her. If she would be content to live on friendly terms with me, and never to exact demon-

strations of tenderness, we might get on pretty well. But she wants love. Unfortunate creature, she wants love!

‘Oh, my Helena! I have no love to give her. My heart is yours.

‘I dreamt last night, that this unhappy wife of mine was dead. The dream was so vivid that I actually got out of my bed, and opened the door of her room, and listened.

‘Her calm regular breathing was distinctly audible in the stillness of the night. She was in a deep sleep. I closed the door again, and lit my candle and read. Helena was in all my thoughts; it was hard work to fix my attention on the book. But anything was better than going to bed again, and dreaming perhaps for the second time that I, too, was free.

‘What a life mine is! what a life my wife’s is! If the house was to take fire, I wonder whether I should make an effort to save myself, or to save her?’

The last two passages read, referred to later dates still.

‘ A gleam of brightness has shone over this dismal existence of mine at last.

‘ Helena is no longer condemned to the seclusion of widowhood. Time enough has passed to permit of her mixing again in society. She is paying visits to friends in our part of Scotland ; and, as she and I are cousins, it is universally understood that she cannot leave the North without also spending a few days at my house. She writes me word that the visit, however embarrassing it may be to us privately, is nevertheless a visit that must be made, for the sake of appearances. Blessings on appearances ! I shall see this angel in my purgatory—and all because Society in Mid-Lothian would think it strange that my cousin should be visiting in my part of Scotland, and not visit Me !

‘ But we are to be very careful. Helena says, in so many words, “ I come to see you, Eustace, as a sister. You must receive me as a brother, or not receive me at all. I shall write to your wife to propose the day for my visit. I shall not

forget—do you not forget—that it is by your wife's permission that I enter your house."

'Only let me see her! I will submit to anything to obtain the unutterable happiness of seeing her!'

The last Extract followed, and consisted of these lines only :

'A new misfortune! My wife has fallen ill. She has taken to her bed, with a bad rheumatic cold, just at the time appointed for Helena's visit to Gleninch. But, on this occasion (I gladly own it!), she has behaved charmingly. She has written to Helena to say that her illness is not serious enough to render a change necessary in the arrangements, and to make it her particular request that my cousin's visit shall take place upon the day originally decided on.

'This is a great sacrifice made to me, on my wife's part. Jealous of every woman, under forty, who comes near me, she is of course jealous of Helena—and she controls herself, and trusts me!

‘I am bound to show my gratitude for this, and I will show it. From this day forth, I vow to live more affectionately with my wife. I tenderly embraced her this very morning—and, I hope, poor soul, she did not discover the effort that it cost me.’

There, the readings from the Diary came to an end.

The most unpleasant pages in the whole Report of the Trial were—to me—the pages which contained the extracts from my husband’s Diary. There were expressions, here and there, which not only pained me, but which almost shook Eustace’s position in my estimation. I think I would have given everything I possessed to have had the power of annihilating certain lines in that Diary. As for his passionate expressions of love for Mrs. Beauly, every one of them went through me like a sting! He had whispered words quite as warm into my ears, in the days of his courtship. I had no reason to doubt that he truly and dearly loved me. But the question was—

Had he, just as truly and dearly, loved Mrs. Beauly, before me? Had she or I won the first of his heart? He had declared to me, over and over again, that he had only fancied himself to be in love, before the day when we met. I had believed him then. I determined to believe him still. I did believe him. But I hated Mrs. Beauly!

As for the painful impression produced in Court by the readings from the letters and the Diary, it seemed to be impossible to increase it. Nevertheless, it *was* perceptibly increased. In other words, it was rendered more unfavourable still towards the prisoner, by the evidence of the next, and last, witness called on the part of the prosecution.

William Enzie, under-gardener at Gleninch, was sworn, and deposed as follows:

‘On the twentieth of October, at eleven o’clock in the forenoon, I was at work in the shrubbery, on the side next to the garden called the Dutch Garden. There was a



summer-house in the Dutch Garden, having its back set towards the shrubbery. The day was wonderfully fine and warm for the time of year.

‘ Passing to my work, I passed the back of the summer-house. I heard voices inside—a man’s voice and a lady’s voice. The lady’s voice was strange to me. The man’s voice I recognised as the voice of my master. The ground in the shrubbery was soft; and my curiosity was excited. I stepped up to the back of the summer-house, without being heard; and I listened to what was going on inside.

‘ The first words I could distinguish were spoken in my master’s voice. He said, “If I could only have foreseen that you might one day be free, what a happy man I might have been!” The lady’s voice answered, “Hush! you must not talk so.” My master said upon that, “I must talk of what is in my mind; it is always in my mind that I have lost you.” He stopped a bit there, and then he said on a sudden, “Do me one favour, my

angel! Promise me not to marry again.” The lady’s voice spoke out, thereupon, sharply enough, “What do you mean?” My master said, “I wish no harm to the unhappy creature who is a burden on my life; but suppose——?” “Suppose nothing,” the lady said; “come back to the house.”

‘She led the way into the garden, and turned round, beckoning my master to join her. In that position, I saw her face plainly; and I knew it for the face of the young widow lady who was visiting at the house. She was pointed out to me by the head-gardener, when she first arrived, for the purpose of warning me that I was not to interfere if I found her picking the flowers. The gardens at Gleninch were shown to tourists on certain days; and we made a difference, of course, in the matter of the flowers, between strangers and guests staying in the house. I am quite certain of the identity of the lady who was talking with my master. Mrs. Beauily was a comely person—and there was no mis-

taking her for any other than herself. She and my master withdrew together on the way to the house. I heard nothing more of what passed between them.'

This witness was severely cross-examined as to the correctness of his recollection of the talk in the summer-house, and as to his capacity for identifying both the speakers. On certain minor points he was shaken. But he firmly asserted his accurate remembrance of the last words exchanged between his master and Mrs. Beaulieu; and he personally described the lady, in terms which proved that he had correctly identified her.

With this, the answer to the third Question raised by the Trial—the question of the prisoner's Motive for poisoning his wife—came to an end.

The story for the prosecution was now a story told. The staunchest friends of the prisoner in Court were compelled to acknowledge that the evidence, thus far, pointed clearly and conclusively against him. He seemed to feel this himself.

When he withdrew at the close of the third day of the Trial, he was so depressed and exhausted that he was obliged to lean on the arm of the governor of the jail.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE EVIDENCE FOR THE DEFENCE.

THE feeling of interest excited by the Trial was prodigiously increased on the fourth day. The witnesses for the defence were now to be heard ; and first and foremost among them was the prisoner's mother. She looked at her son as she lifted her veil to take the oath. He burst into tears. At that moment, the sympathy felt for the mother was generally extended to the unhappy son.

Examined by the Dean of Faculty, Mrs. Macallan the elder gave her answers with remarkable dignity and self-control.

Questioned as to certain private conversations which had passed between her late daughter-in-law and herself, she de-

clared that Mrs. Eustace Macallan was morbidly sensitive on the subject of her personal appearance. She was devotedly attached to her husband ; the great anxiety of her life was to make herself as attractive to him as possible. The imperfections in her personal appearance—and especially in her complexion—were subjects to her of the bitterest regret. The witness had heard her say, over and over again (referring to her complexion), that there was no risk she would not run, and no pain she would not suffer, to improve it. ‘Men’ (she had said) ‘are all caught by outward appearances : my husband might love me better, if I had a better colour.’

Being asked next if the passages from her son’s Diary were to be depended on as evidence—that is to say, if they fairly represented the peculiarities in his character, and his true sentiments towards his wife—Mrs. Macallan denied it in the plainest and the strongest terms.

‘The extracts from my son’s Diary are a libel on his character,’ she said. ‘And

not the less a libel, because they happen to be written by himself. Speaking from a mother's experience of him, I know that he must have written the passages produced, in moments of uncontrollable depression and despair. No just person judges hastily of a man by the rash words which may escape him in his moody and miserable moments. Is my son to be so judged, because he happens to have written *his* rash words, instead of speaking them? His pen has been his most deadly enemy, in this case—it has presented him at his very worst. He was not happy in his marriage—I admit that. But I say at the same time, that he was invariably considerate towards his wife. I was implicitly trusted by both of them; I saw them in their most private moments. I declare—in the face of what she appears to have written to her friends and correspondents—that my son never gave his wife any just cause to assert that he treated her with cruelty and neglect.'

These words, firmly and clearly spoken,

produced a strong impression. The Lord Advocate—evidently perceiving that any attempt to weaken that impression would not be likely to succeed—confined himself, in cross-examination, to two significant questions.

‘In speaking to you of the defects in her complexion,’ he said, ‘did your daughter-in-law refer in any way to the use of arsenic as a remedy?’

The answer to this was, ‘No.’

The Lord Advocate proceeded:

‘Did you yourself ever recommend arsenic, or mention it casually, in the course of the private conversations which you have described?’

The answer to this was, ‘Never.’

The Lord Advocate resumed his seat. Mrs. Macallan the elder withdrew.

An interest of a new kind was excited by the appearance of the next witness. This was no less a person than Mrs. Beaully herself. The Report describes her as a remarkably attractive person; modest and ladylike in her manner, and, to all appear-



ance, feeling sensitively the public position in which she was placed.

The first portion of her evidence was almost a recapitulation of the evidence given by the prisoner's mother—with this difference, that Mrs. Beaully had been actually questioned by the deceased lady on the subject of cosmetic applications to the complexion. Mrs. Eustace Macallan had complimented her on the beauty of her complexion, and had asked what artificial means she used to keep it in such good order. Using no artificial means (and knowing nothing whatever of cosmetics), Mrs. Beaully had resented the question; and a temporary coolness between the two ladies had been the result.

Interrogated as to her relations with the prisoner, Mrs. Beaully indignantly denied that she or Mr. Macallan had ever given the deceased lady the slightest cause for jealousy. It was impossible for Mrs. Beaully to leave Scotland, after visiting at the houses of her cousin's neighbours, without also visiting at

her cousin's house. To take any other course would have been an act of downright rudeness, and would have excited remark. She did not deny that Mr. Macallan had admired her in the days when they were both single people. But there was no further expression of that feeling, when she had married another man, and when he had married another woman. From that time, their intercourse was the innocent intercourse of a brother and sister. Mr. Macallan was a gentleman : he knew what was due to his wife and to Mrs. Beaully—she would not have entered the house, if experience had not satisfied her of that. As for the evidence of the under-gardener, it was little better than pure invention. The greater part of the conversation which he had described himself as overhearing had never taken place. The little that was really said (as the man reported it) was said jestingly; and she had checked it immediately—as the witness had himself confessed. For the rest, Mr. Macallan's behaviour towards his wife was

invariably kind and considerate. He was constantly devising means to alleviate her sufferings from the rheumatic affection which confined her to her bed ; he had spoken of her, not once but many times, in terms of the sincerest sympathy. When she ordered her husband and witness to leave the room, on the day of her death, Mr. Macallan said to witness afterwards, "We must bear with her jealousy, poor soul : we know that we don't deserve it." In that patient manner, he submitted to her infirmities of temper, from first to last.

The main interest in the cross-examination of Mrs. Beauly, centred in a question which was put at the end. After reminding her that she had given her name, on being sworn, as ' Helena Beauly,' the Lord Advocate said :

' A letter addressed to the prisoner, and signed " Helena," has been read in Court. Look at it, if you please. Are you the writer of that letter ? '

Before the witness could reply, the

Dean of Faculty protested against the question. The Judges allowed the protest, and refused to permit the question to be put. Mrs. Beaully thereupon withdrew. She had betrayed a very perceptible agitation on hearing the letter referred to, and on having it placed in her hands. This exhibition of feeling was variously interpreted among the audience. Upon the whole, however, Mrs. Beaully's evidence was considered to have aided the impression which the mother's evidence had produced in the prisoner's favour.

The next witnesses—both ladies, and both school-friends of Mrs. Eustace Macallan—created a new feeling of interest in Court. They supplied the missing link in the evidence for the defence.

The first of the ladies declared that she had mentioned arsenic, as a means of improving the complexion, in conversation with Mrs. Eustace Macallan. She had never used it herself, but she had read of the practice of eating arsenic, among the Styrian peasantry, for the purpose of clear-

ing the colour, and of producing a general appearance of plumpness and good health. She positively swore that she had related this result of her reading to the deceased lady, exactly as she now related it in Court.

The second witness, present at the conversation already mentioned, corroborated the first witness in every particular; and added that she had procured the book relating to the arsenic-eating practices of the Styrian peasantry, and to their results, at Mrs. Eustace Macallan's own request. This book she had herself despatched by post to Mrs. Eustace Macallan at Gleninch.

There was but one assailable point in this otherwise conclusive evidence. The cross-examination discovered it.

Both the ladies were asked, in turn, if Mrs. Eustace Macallan had expressed to them, directly or indirectly, any intention of obtaining arsenic, with a view to the improvement of her complexion. In each case the answer to that all-important ques-

tion was, 'No.' Mrs. Eustace Macallan had heard of the remedy, and had received the book. But of her own intentions in the future, she had not said one word. She had begged both the ladies to consider the conversation as strictly private—and there it had ended.

It required no lawyer's eye to discern the fatal defect which was now revealed in the evidence for the defence. Every intelligent person present could see that the prisoner's chance of an honourable acquittal depended on tracing the poison to the possession of his wife—or at least on proving her expressed intention to obtain it. In either of these cases, the prisoner's Declaration of his innocence would claim the support of testimony, which—however indirect it might be—no honest and intelligent men would be likely to resist. Was that testimony forthcoming? Was the counsel for the defence not at the end of his resources yet?

The crowded audience waited, in breathless expectation, for the appearance

of the next witness. A whisper went round, among certain well-instructed persons, that the Court was now to see and hear the prisoner's old friend—already often referred to in the course of the Trial, as 'Mr. Dexter.'

After a brief interval of delay, there was a sudden commotion among the audience, accompanied by suppressed exclamations of curiosity and surprise. At the same moment, the crier summoned the new witness by the extraordinary name of—

'MISERRIMUS DEXTER.'

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE END OF THE TRIAL.

THE calling of the witness produced a burst of laughter from the public seats—due partly, no doubt, to the strange name by which he had been summoned; partly, also, to the instinctive desire of all crowded assemblies, when their interest is painfully excited, to seize on any relief in the shape of the first excuse for merriment which may present itself. A severe rebuke from the Bench restored order among the audience. The Lord Justice Clerk declared that he would ‘clear the Court’ if the interruption to the proceedings was renewed.

During the silence which followed this announcement, the new witness appeared.

Gliding, self-propelled in his chair on



wheels, through the opening made for him among the crowd, a strange and startling creature—literally the half of a man—revealed himself to the general view. A coverlid, which had been thrown over his chair, had fallen off during his progress through the throng. The loss of it exposed to the public curiosity the head, the arms, and the trunk of a living human being : absolutely deprived of the lower limbs. To make this deformity all the more striking and all the more terrible, the victim of it was—as to his face and his body—an unusually handsome, and an unusually well-made man. His long silky hair, of a bright and beautiful chestnut colour, fell over shoulders that were the perfection of strength and grace. His face was bright with vivacity and intelligence. His large clear blue eyes, and his long delicate white hands, were like the eyes and hands of a beautiful woman. He would have looked effeminate, but for the manly proportions of his throat and chest ; aided in their effect by his flowing beard and long moustache,

of a lighter chestnut shade than the colour of his hair. Never had a magnificent head and body been more hopelessly ill-bestowed than in this instance! Never had Nature committed a more careless or a more cruel mistake than in the making of this man!

He was sworn, seated of course in his chair. Having given his name, he bowed to the Judges, and requested their permission to preface his evidence with a word of explanation.

‘People generally laugh when they first hear my strange Christian name,’ he said, in a low clear resonant voice which penetrated to the remotest corners of the Court. ‘I may inform the good people here that many names, still common among us, have their significations, and that mine is one of them. “Alexander,” for instance, means, in the Greek, “a helper of men.” “David” means, in Hebrew, “well-beloved.” “Francis” means, in German, “free.” My name, “Miserrimus,” means, in Latin, “most unhappy.” It was given to me by my father, in allusion to the deformity which

you all see—the deformity with which it was my misfortune to be born. You won't laugh at "Miserrimus" again, will you?' He turned to the Dean of Faculty, waiting to examine him for the defence. 'Mr. Dean, I am at your service. I apologise for delaying, even for a moment, the proceedings of the Court.'

He delivered his little address with perfect grace and good humour. Examined by the Dean, he gave his evidence clearly, without the slightest appearance of hesitation or reserve.

'I was staying at Gleninch, as a guest in the house, at the time of Mrs. Eustace Macallan's death,' he began. 'Doctor Jerome and Mr. Gale desired to see me, at a private interview—the prisoner being then in a state of prostration which made it impossible for him to attend to his duties as master of the house. At this interview, the two doctors astonished and horrified me, by declaring that Mrs. Eustace Macallan had died poisoned. They left it to me to communicate the dreadful news to

her husband ; and they warned me that a post-mortem examination must be held on the body.

‘ If the Fiscal had seen my old friend, when I communicated the doctors’ message, I doubt if he would have ventured to charge the prisoner with the murder of his wife. To my mind the charge was nothing less than an outrage. I resisted the seizure of the prisoner’s Diary and letters, animated by that feeling. Now that the Diary has been produced, I agree with the prisoner’s mother in denying that it is fair evidence to bring against him. A Diary (when it extends beyond a bare record of facts and dates) is, in general, nothing but an expression of the weakest side in the character of the person who keeps it. It is, in nine cases out of ten, the more or less contemptible outpouring of vanity and conceit which the writer dare not exhibit to any mortal but himself. I am the prisoner’s oldest friend. I solemnly declare that I never knew he could write downright

nonsense, until I heard his Diary read in this Court !

‘*He* kill his wife ! *He* treat his wife with neglect and cruelty ! I venture to say, from twenty years’ experience of him, that there is no man in this assembly who is, constitutionally, more incapable of crime, and more incapable of cruelty, than the man who stands at that Bar. While I am about it, I go further still. I even doubt whether a man capable of crime, and capable of cruelty, could have found it in his heart to do evil to the woman whose untimely death is the subject of this enquiry.

‘I have heard what the ignorant and prejudiced nurse, Christina Ormsay, has said of the deceased lady. From my own personal observation I contradict every word of it. Mrs. Eustace Macallan—granting her personal defects—was nevertheless one of the most charming women I ever met with. She was highly bred, in the best sense of the word. I never saw,

in any other person, so sweet a smile as hers, or such grace and beauty of movement as hers. If you liked music, she sang beautifully ; and few professed musicians had such a touch on the piano as hers. If you preferred talking, I never yet met with the man (or even the woman, which is saying a great deal more) whom her conversation could not charm. To say that such a wife as this could be first cruelly neglected, and then barbarously murdered, by the man—no ! by the martyr—who stands there, is to tell me that the sun never shines at noonday, or that the heaven is not above the earth.

‘Oh, yes ! I know that the letters of her friends show that she wrote to them in bitter complaint of her husband’s conduct to her. But remember what one of those friends (the wisest and the best of them) says in reply. “I own to thinking,” she writes, “that your sensitive nature exaggerates or misinterprets the neglect that you experience at the hands of your husband.” There, in that one sentence, is the whole

truth! Mrs. Eustace Macallan's nature was the imaginative, self-tormenting nature of a poet. No mortal love could ever have been refined enough for *her*. Trifles which women of a coarser moral fibre would have passed over without notice, were causes of downright agony to that exquisitely sensitive temperament. There are persons born to be unhappy. That poor lady was one of them. When I have said this, I have said all.

‘No! There is one word more still to be added.

‘It may be as well to remind the prosecution that Mrs. Eustace Macallan's death was, in the pecuniary sense, a serious loss to her husband. He had insisted on having the whole of her fortune settled on herself, and on her relatives after her, when he married. Her income from that fortune helped to keep in splendour the house and grounds at Gleninch. The prisoner's own resources (aided even by his mother's jointure) were quite inadequate fitly to defray the expenses of living at his

splendid country seat. Knowing all the circumstances, I can positively assert that the wife's death has deprived the husband of two-thirds of his income. And the prosecution, viewing him as the basest and cruellest of men, declares that he deliberately killed her—with all his pecuniary interests pointing to the preservation of her life !

‘It is useless to ask me whether I noticed anything in the conduct of the prisoner and Mrs. Beaully, which might justify a wife's jealousy. I never observed Mrs. Beaully with any attention ; and I never encouraged the prisoner in talking to me about her. He was a general admirer of pretty women—so far as I know, in a perfectly innocent way. That he could prefer Mrs. Beaully to his wife, is inconceivable to me—unless he was out of his senses. I never had any reason to believe that he was out of his senses.

‘As to the question of the arsenic—I mean the question of tracing the poison to the possession of Mrs. Eustace Macallan—



I am able to give evidence, which may perhaps be worthy of the attention of the Court.

‘I was present, in the Fiscal’s office, during the examination of the papers, and of the other objects discovered at Gleninch. The dressing-case belonging to the deceased lady was shown to me, after its contents had been officially investigated by the Fiscal himself. I happen to have a very sensitive sense of touch. In handling the lid of the dressing-case, on the inner side, I felt something at a certain place, which induced me to examine the whole structure of the lid very carefully. The result was the discovery of a private repository, concealed in the space between the outer wood and the lining. In that repository I found the bottle which I now produce.’

The further examination of the witness was suspended, while the hidden bottle was compared with the bottles properly belonging to the dressing-case.

These last were of the finest cut glass, and of a very elegant form—entirely unlike

the bottle found in the private repository, which was of the commonest manufacture, and of the shape ordinarily in use among chemists. Not a drop of liquid, not the smallest atom of any solid substance, remained in it. No smell exhaled from it—and, more unfortunately still for the interests of the defence, no label was found attached to the bottle when it had been discovered.

The chemist who had sold the second supply of arsenic to the prisoner was recalled, and examined. He declared that the bottle was exactly like the bottle in which he placed the arsenic. It was, however, equally like hundreds of other bottles in his shop. In the absence of the label (on which he had himself written the word 'Poison') it was impossible for him to identify the bottle. The dressing-case, and the deceased lady's bedroom, had been vainly searched for the chemist's missing label—on the chance that it might have become accidentally detached from the mysterious empty bottle. In both instances,

the search had been without result. Morally, it was a fair conclusion that this might be really the bottle which had contained the poison. Legally, there was not the slightest proof of it.

Thus ended the last effort of the defence to trace the arsenic purchased by the prisoner to the possession of his wife. The book relating the practices of the Styrian peasantry (found in the deceased lady's room) had been produced. But could the book prove that she had asked her husband to buy arsenic for her? The crumpled paper, with the grains of powder left in it, had been identified by the chemist, and had been declared to contain grains of arsenic. But where was the proof that Mrs. Eustace Macallan's hand had placed the packet in the cabinet, and had emptied it of its contents? No direct evidence anywhere! Nothing but conjecture!

The renewed examination of Miserimus Dexter touched on matters of no general interest. The cross-examination resolved itself, in substance, into a mental

trial of strength between the witness and the Lord Advocate ; the struggle terminating (according to the general opinion) in favour of the witness. One question, and one answer only, I will repeat here. They appeared to me of serious importance to the object that I had in view in reading the Trial.

‘I believe, Mr. Dexter,’ the Lord Advocate remarked, in his most ironical manner, ‘that you have a theory of your own, which makes the death of Mrs. Eustace Macallan no mystery to *you*?’

‘I may have my own ideas on that subject, as on other subjects,’ the witness replied. ‘But let me ask their lordships, the Judges—Am I here to declare theories or to state facts?’

I made a note of that answer. Mr. Dexter’s ‘ideas’ were the ideas of a true friend to my husband, and of a man of far more than average ability. They might be of inestimable value to me, in the coming time—if I could prevail on him to communicate them.

I may mention, while I am writing on

the subject, that I added to this first note a second, containing an observation of my own. In alluding to Mrs. Beauly, while he was giving his evidence, Mr. Dexter had spoken of her so slightly — so rudely, I might almost say—as to suggest that he had some private reasons for disliking (perhaps for distrusting) this lady. Here, again, it might be of vital importance to me to see Mr. Dexter, and to clear up, if I could, what the dignity of the Court had passed over without notice.

The last witness had been now examined. The chair on wheels glided away, with the half-man in it, and was lost in a distant corner of the Court. The Lord Advocate rose to address the Jury for the prosecution.

I do not scruple to say that I never read anything so infamous as this great lawyer's speech. He was not ashamed to declare, at starting, that he firmly believed the prisoner to be guilty. What right had he to say anything of the sort? Was it

for *him* to decide? Was he the Judge and Jury both, I should like to know? Having begun by condemning the prisoner, on his own authority, the Lord Advocate proceeded to pervert the most innocent actions of that unhappy man, so as to give them as vile an aspect as possible. Thus: When Eustace kissed his poor wife's forehead, on her death-bed, he did it to create a favourable impression in the minds of the doctor and the nurse! Again, when his grief under his bereavement completely overwhelmed him, he was triumphing in secret, and acting a part! If you looked into his heart, you would see there a diabolical hatred for his wife, and an infatuated passion for Mrs. Beauly! In everything he had said, he had lied; in everything he had done, he had acted like a crafty and heartless wretch! So the chief counsel for the prosecution spoke of the prisoner, standing helpless before him at the Bar. In my husband's place, if I could have done nothing more, I would have thrown something at his head. As it was,

I tore the pages which contained the speech for the prosecution out of the Report, and trampled them under my feet—and felt all the better, too, for having done it. At the same time, I am a little ashamed of having revenged myself on the harmless printed leaves, now.

The fifth day of the Trial opened with the speech for the defence. Ah, what a contrast to the infamies uttered by the Lord Advocate was the grand burst of eloquence by the Dean of Faculty, speaking on my husband's side!

This illustrious lawyer struck the right note at starting.

‘I yield to no one,’ he began, ‘in the pity I feel for the wife. But I say, the martyr in this case, from first to last, is the husband. Whatever the poor woman may have endured, that unhappy man at the Bar has suffered, and is now suffering, more. If he had not been the kindest of men, the most docile and most devoted of husbands, he would never have occupied his present dreadful situation. A man of a

meaner and harder nature would have felt suspicion of his wife's motives, when she asked him to buy poison—would have seen through the wretchedly commonplace excuses she made for wanting it—and would have wisely and cruelly said, "No." The prisoner is not that sort of man. He is too good to his wife, too innocent of any evil thought towards her, or towards anyone, to foresee the inconveniences and the dangers to which his fatal compliance may expose him. And what is the result? He stands there, branded as a murderer, because he was too high-minded and too honourable to suspect his wife.'

Speaking thus of the husband, the Dean was just as eloquent and just as unanswerable when he came to speak of the wife.

'The Lord Advocate,' he said, 'has asked, with the bitter irony for which he is celebrated at the Scottish Bar, why we have failed entirely to prove that the prisoner placed the two packets of poison in the possession of his wife? I say, in



answer, we have proved, first, that the wife was passionately attached to the husband ; secondly, that she felt bitterly the defects in her personal appearance, and especially the defects in her complexion ; and, thirdly, that she was informed of arsenic as a supposed remedy for these defects, taken internally. To men who know anything of human nature, there is proof enough ! Does my learned friend actually suppose, that women are in the habit of mentioning the secret artifices and applications by which they improve their personal appearance ? Is it in his experience of the sex, that a woman who is eagerly bent on making herself attractive to a man, would tell that man, or tell anybody else who might communicate with him, that the charm by which she hoped to win his heart—say the charm of a pretty complexion—had been artificially acquired by the perilous use of a deadly poison ? The bare idea of such a thing is absurd. Of course, nobody ever heard Mrs. Eustace Macallan speak of arsenic. Of course, nobody ever surprised her in the

act of taking arsenic. It is in the evidence, that she would not even confide her intention to try the poison to the friends who had told her of it as a remedy, and who had got her the book. She actually begged them to consider their brief conversation on the subject as strictly private. From first to last, poor creature, she kept her secret; just as she would have kept her secret, if she had worn false hair, or if she had been indebted to the dentist for her teeth. And there you see her husband, in peril of his life, because a woman acted *like* a woman—as your wives, Gentlemen of the Jury, would, in a similar position, act towards You.’

After such glorious oratory as this (I wish I had room to quote more of it!) the next, and last, speech delivered at the Trial—that is to say the Charge of the Judge to the Jury—is dreary reading indeed.

His lordship first told the Jury that they could not expect to have direct evidence of the poisoning. Such evidence hardly ever occurred in cases of poisoning.

They must be satisfied with the best circumstantial evidence. All quite true, I dare say. But, having told the Jury they might accept circumstantial evidence, he turned back again on his own words, and warned them against being too ready to trust it! ‘You must have evidence satisfactory and convincing to your own minds,’ he said; ‘in which you find no conjectures—but only irresistible and just inferences.’ Who is to decide what is a just inference? And what does circumstantial evidence rest on, *but* conjecture?

After this specimen, I need give no further extracts from the summing-up. The Jury, thoroughly bewildered no doubt, took refuge in a compromise. They occupied an hour in considering and debating among themselves, in their own room. (A jury of women would not have taken a minute!) Then they returned into Court, and gave their timid and trimming Scotch Verdict in these words:

‘Not Proven.’

Some slight applause followed, among

the audience, which was instantly checked. The prisoner was dismissed from the Bar with the formalities observed on such occasions. He slowly retired, like a man in deep grief; his head sunk on his breast—not looking at anyone, and not replying when his friends spoke to him. He knew, poor fellow, the slur that the Verdict left on him. ‘We don’t say you are innocent of the crime charged against you; we only say, there is not evidence enough to convict you.’ In that lame and impotent conclusion the proceedings ended, at the time. And there they would have remained, for all time—but for Me.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## I SEE MY WAY.

IN the grey light of the new morning, I closed the Report of my husband's Trial for the Murder of his first Wife.

No sense of fatigue overpowered me. I had no wish, after my long hours of reading and thinking, to lie down and sleep. It was strange, but it was so. I felt as if I *had* slept, and had now just awakened—a new woman, with a new mind.

I could almost understand Eustace's desertion of me. To a man of his refinement, it would have been a martyrdom to meet his wife, after she had read the things published of him to all the world, in the Report. I felt this, as he would have felt it. At the same time, I thought he

might have trusted Me to make amends to him for the martyrdom, and might have come back. Perhaps, it might yet end in his coming back. In the meanwhile, and in that expectation, I pitied and forgave him with my whole heart.

One little matter only dwelt on my mind disagreeably, in spite of my philosophy. Did Eustace still secretly love Mrs. Beauly? or had I extinguished that passion in him? To what order of beauty did this lady belong? Were we, by any chance, the least in the world like one another?

The window of my room looked to the east. I drew up the blind, and saw the sun rising grandly in a clear sky. The temptation to go out and breathe the fresh morning air was irresistible. I put on my hat and shawl, and took the Report of the Trial under my arm. The bolts of the back door were easily drawn. In another minute, I was out in Benjamin's pretty little garden.

Composed and strengthened by the in-

viting solitude and the delicious air, I found courage enough to face the serious question that now confronted me—the question of the future.

I had read the Trial. I had vowed to devote my life to the sacred object of vindicating my husband's innocence. A solitary defenceless woman, I stood pledged to myself to carry that desperate resolution through to an end. How was I to begin?

The bold way of beginning was surely the wise way, in such a position as mine. I had good reasons (founded, as I have already mentioned, on the important part played by this witness at the Trial) for believing that the fittest person to advise and assist me, was—Miserrimus Dexter. He might disappoint the expectations that I had fixed on him, or he might refuse to help me, or (like my uncle Starkweather) he might think I had taken leave of my senses. All these events were possible. Nevertheless, I held to my resolution to try the experiment. If he was in the land of the living, I decided that my first step

at starting should take me to the deformed man, with the strange name.

Supposing he received me, sympathised with me, understood me? What would he say? The nurse, in her evidence, had reported him as speaking in an off-hand manner. He would say, in all probability, 'What do you mean to do? And how can I help you to do it?'

Had I answers ready, if those two plain questions were put to me? Yes! if I dared own to any human creature, what was, at that very moment, secretly fermenting in my mind. Yes! if I could confide to a stranger, a suspicion roused in me by the Trial, which I have been thus far afraid to mention even in these pages!

'It must, nevertheless, be mentioned now. My suspicion led to results, which are part of my story, and part of my life.

Let me own then, to begin with, that I closed the record of the Trial actually agreeing, in one important particular, with the opinion of my enemy and my husband's enemy—the Lord Advocate! He had



characterised the explanation of Mrs. Eustace Macallan's death, offered by the defence, as 'a clumsy subterfuge, in which no reasonable being could discern the smallest fragment of probability.' Without going quite so far as this, I, too, could see no reason whatever in the evidence for assuming that the poor woman had taken an overdose of the poison, by mistake. I believed that she had the arsenic secretly in her possession, and that she had tried, or intended to try, the use of it internally, for the purpose of improving her complexion. But further than this I could not advance. The more I thought of it, the more plainly justified the lawyers for the prosecution seemed to me to be, in declaring that Mrs. Eustace Macallan had died by the hand of a poisoner—although they were entirely and certainly mistaken in charging my husband with the crime.

My husband being innocent, somebody else, on my own showing, must be guilty. Who, among the persons inhabiting the house at the time, had poisoned Mrs.

Eustace Macallan? My suspicion, in answering that question, pointed straight to a woman. And the name of that woman was—Mrs. Beauly!

Yes! To that startling conclusion I had arrived. It was, to my mind, the inevitable result of reading the evidence.

Look back for a moment to the letter produced in Court, signed ‘Helena,’ and addressed to Mr. Macallan. No reasonable person can doubt (though the Judges excused her from answering the question) that Mrs. Beauly was the writer. Very well. The letter offers, as I think, trustworthy evidence to show the state of the woman’s mind when she paid her visit to Gleninch.

Writing to Mr. Macallan, at a time when she was married to another man—a man to whom she had engaged herself before she met with Mr. Macallan—what does she say? She says, ‘When I think of your life sacrificed to that wretched woman, my heart bleeds for you.’ And, again, she says, ‘If it had been my unut-

terable happiness to love and cherish the best, the dearest of men, what a paradise of our own we might have lived in, what delicious hours we might have known !'

If this is not the language of a woman shamelessly and furiously in love with a man—not her husband—what is ? She is so full of him, that even her idea of another world (see the letter) is the idea of 'embracing' Mr. Macallan's 'soul.' In this condition of mind and morals, the lady one day finds herself and her embraces free, through the death of her husband. As soon as she can decently visit she goes visiting ; and, in due course of time, she becomes the guest of the man whom she adores. His wife is ill in her bed. The one other visitor at Gleninch is a cripple, who can only move in his chair on wheels. The lady has the house and the one beloved object in it, all to herself. No obstacle stands between her, and 'the unutterable happiness of loving and cherishing the best, the dearest of men'—but a poor sick ugly wife, for whom Mr. Macallan never has

felt, and never can feel, the smallest particle of love.

Is it perfectly absurd to believe that such a woman as this, impelled by these motives, and surrounded by these circumstances, would be capable of committing a crime—if the safe opportunity offered itself?

What does her own evidence say?

She admits that she had a conversation with Mrs. Eustace Macallan, in which that lady ‘questioned her on the subject of cosmetic applications to the complexion.’ Did nothing else take place at that interview? Did Mrs. Beaulieu make no discoveries (afterwards turned to fatal account) of the dangerous experiment which her hostess was then trying, to improve her ugly complexion? All we know is, that Mrs. Beaulieu said nothing about it.

What does the under-gardener say?

He heard a conversation between Mr. Macallan and Mrs. Beaulieu, which shows that the possibility of Mrs. Beaulieu becom-

ing Mrs. Eustace Macallan had certainly presented itself to that lady's mind, and was certainly considered by her to be too dangerous a topic of discourse to be pursued. Innocent Mr. Macallan would have gone on talking. Mrs. Beaully is discreet, and stops him.

And what does the nurse (Christina Ormsay) tell us ?

On the day of Mrs. Eustace Macallan's death, the nurse is dismissed from attendance, and is sent downstairs. She leaves the sick woman, recovered from her first attack of illness, and able to amuse herself with writing. The nurse remains away for half an hour, and then gets uneasy at not hearing the invalid's bell. She goes to the Morning Room to consult Mr. Macallan ; and there she hears that Mrs. Beaully is missing. Mr. Macallan doesn't know where she is, and asks Mr. Dexter if he has seen her. Mr. Dexter has not set eyes on her. At what time does the disappearance of Mrs. Beaully take place ? At the

very time when Christina Ormsay had left Mrs. Eustace Macallan alone in her room !

Meanwhile, the bell rings at last, rings violently. The nurse goes back to the sick room at five minutes to eleven, or thereabouts, and finds that the bad symptoms of the morning have returned in a gravely aggravated form. A second dose of poison—larger than the dose administered in the early morning—has been given, during the absence of the nurse, and (observe) during the disappearance also of Mrs. Beauly. The nurse, looking out into the corridor for help, encounters Mrs. Beauly herself, innocently on her way from her own room—just up, we are to suppose, at eleven in the morning!—to enquire after the sick woman.

A little later, Mrs. Beauly accompanies Mr. Macallan to visit the invalid. The dying woman casts a strange look at both of them, and tells them to leave her. Mr. Macallan understands this as the fretful outbreak of a person in pain, and waits in

the room to tell the nurse that the doctor is sent for. What does Mrs. Beaully do? She runs out panic-stricken, the instant Mrs. Eustace Macallan looks at her. Even Mrs. Beaully, it seems, has a conscience!

Is there nothing to justify suspicion in such circumstances as these—circumstances sworn to, on the oaths of the witnesses?

To me, the conclusion is plain. Mrs. Beaully's hand gave that second dose of poison. Admit this; and the inference follows that she also gave the first dose in the early morning. How could she do it? Look again at the evidence. The nurse admits that she was asleep, from past two in the morning to six. She also speaks of a locked door of communication with the sick room, the key of which had been removed, nobody knew by whom. Some person must have stolen that key. Why not Mrs. Beaully?

One word more, and all that I had in my mind at that time will be honestly revealed.

Miserrimus Dexter, under cross-examination, had indirectly admitted that he had ideas of his own on the subject of Mrs. Eustace Macallan's death. At the same time, he had spoken of Mrs. Beauly in a tone which plainly betrayed that he was no friend to that lady. Did *he* suspect her, too? My chief motive in deciding to ask his advice, before I applied to anyone else, was to find an opportunity of putting that question to him. If he really thought of her as I did, my course was clear before me. The next step to take would be carefully to conceal my identity—and then to present myself, in the character of a harmless stranger, to Mrs. Beauly.

There were difficulties, of course, in my way. The first and greatest difficulty was to obtain an introduction to Miserrimus Dexter.

The composing influence of the fresh air in the garden had, by this time, made me readier to lie down and rest than to occupy my mind in reflecting on my diffi-



culties. Little by little, I grew too drowsy to think—then too lazy to go on walking. My bed looked wonderfully inviting, as I passed by the open window of my room.

In five minutes more I had accepted the invitation of the bed, and had said farewell to my anxieties and my troubles. In five minutes more I was fast asleep.

A discreetly gentle knock at my door was the first sound that roused me. I heard the voice of my good old Benjamin speaking outside.

‘My dear! I am afraid you will be starved if I let you sleep any longer. It is half-past one o’clock; and a friend of yours has come to lunch with us.’

A friend of mine? What friends had I? My husband was far away; and my uncle Starkweather had given me up in despair.

‘Who is it?’ I cried out from my bed, through the door.

‘Major Fitz-David,’ Benjamin answered—by the same medium.

I sprang out of bed. The very man I

wanted was waiting to see me! Major Fitz-David, as the phrase is, knew everybody. Intimate with my husband, he would certainly know my husband's old friend—Miserrimus Dexter.

Shall I confess that I took particular pains with my toilet, and that I kept the luncheon waiting? The woman doesn't live who would have done otherwise—when she had a particular favour to ask of Major Fitz-David.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE MAJOR MAKES DIFFICULTIES.

As I opened the dining-room door, the Major hastened to meet me. He looked the brightest and the youngest of living elderly gentlemen—with his smart blue frock-coat, his winning smile, his ruby ring, and his ready compliment. It was quite cheering to meet the modern Don Juan once more.

‘I don’t ask after your health,’ said the old gentleman; ‘your eyes answer me, my dear lady, before I can put the question. At your age a long sleep is the true beauty-draught. Plenty of bed—there is the simple secret of keeping your good looks and living a long life—plenty of bed!’

‘I have not been so long in my bed, Major, as you suppose. To tell the truth, I have been up all night, reading.’

Major Fitz-David lifted his well-painted eyebrows, in polite surprise.

‘What is the happy book which has interested you so deeply?’ he asked.

‘The book,’ I answered, ‘is the Trial of my husband for the murder of his first wife.’

The Major’s smile vanished. He drew back a step, with a look of dismay.

‘Don’t mention that horrid book!’ he exclaimed. ‘Don’t speak of that dreadful subject! What have beauty and grace to do with Trials, Poisonings, Horrors? Why, my charming friend, profane your lips by talking of such things? Why frighten away the Loves and the Graces that lie hid in your smile? Humour an old fellow who adores the Loves and the Graces, and who asks nothing better than to sun himself in your smile. Luncheon is ready. Let us be cheerful. Let us laugh, and lunch.’

He led me to the table and filled my plate and my glass, with the air of a man who considered himself to be engaged in

one of the most important occupations of his life. Benjamin kept the conversation going on in the interval.

‘Major Fitz-David brings you some news, my dear,’ he said. ‘Your mother-in-law, Mrs. Macallan, is coming here to see you to-day.’

My mother-in-law coming to see me ! I turned eagerly to the Major for further information.

‘Has Mrs. Macallan heard anything of my husband ?’ I asked. ‘Is she coming here to tell me about him ?’

‘She has heard from him, I believe,’ said the Major ; ‘and she has also heard from your uncle, the Vicar. Our excellent Starkweather has written to her—to what purpose I have not been informed. I only know that on receipt of his letter, she has decided on paying you a visit. I met the old lady last night at a party ; and I tried hard to discover whether she was coming to you as your friend or your enemy. My powers of persuasion were completely thrown away on her. The fact

is,' said the Major, speaking in the character of a youth of five-and-twenty, making a modest confession, 'I don't get on well with old women. Take the will for the deed, my sweet friend. I have tried to be of some use to you—and I have failed.'

Those words offered me the opportunity for which I was waiting. I determined not to lose it.

'You can be of the greatest use to me,' I said, 'if you will allow me to presume, Major, on your past kindness. I want to ask you a question: and I may have a favour to beg when you have answered me.'

Major Fitz-David set down his wine-glass on its way to his lips, and looked at me with an appearance of breathless interest.

'Command me, my dear lady—I am yours and yours only,' said the gallant old gentleman. 'What do you wish to ask me?'

'I wish to ask you if you know Miserimus Dexter?'

‘Good Heavens!’ cried the Major; ‘that *is* an unexpected question! Know Miserrimus Dexter? I have known him for more years than I like to reckon up. What *can* be your object ——?’

‘I can tell you what my object is in two words,’ I interposed. ‘I want you to give me an introduction to Miserrimus Dexter.’

My impression is that the Major turned pale under his paint. This, at any rate, is certain; his sparkling little grey eyes looked at me in undisguised bewilderment and alarm.

‘You want to know Miserrimus Dexter?’ he repeated, with the air of a man who doubted the evidence of his own senses. ‘Mr. Benjamin! have I taken too much of your excellent wine? Am I the victim of a delusion—or did our fair friend really ask me to give her an introduction to Miserrimus Dexter?’

Benjamin looked at me in some bewilderment on his side, and answered quite seriously—

‘I think you said so, my dear.’

‘I certainly said so.’ I rejoined. ‘What is there so very surprising in my request?’

‘The man is mad!’ cried the Major. ‘In all England you could not have picked out a person more essentially unfit to be introduced to a lady—to a young lady especially—than Dexter. Have you heard of his horrible deformity?’

‘I have heard of it—and it doesn’t daunt me.’

‘Doesn’t daunt you? My dear lady, the man’s mind is as deformed as his body. What Voltaire said satirically of the character of his countrymen in general, is literally true of Miserrimus Dexter. He is a mixture of the tiger and the monkey. At one moment, he would frighten you; and at the next, he would set you screaming with laughter. I don’t deny that he is clever in some respects—brilliantly clever, I admit. And I don’t say that he has ever committed any acts of violence, or ever willingly injured anybody. But, for all that, he is mad, if ever a man was mad yet. Forgive me if the enquiry is impertinent.



What can your motive possibly be for wanting an introduction to Miserrimus Dexter ?'

'I want to consult him.'

'May I ask on what subject ?'

'On the subject of my husband's Trial.'

Major Fitz-David groaned, and sought a momentary consolation in his friend Benjamin's claret.

'That dreadful subject again !' he exclaimed. 'Mr. Benjamin, why does she persist in dwelling on that dreadful subject ?'

'I must dwell on what is now the one employment and the one hope of my life,' I said. 'I have reason to think that Miserrimus Dexter can help me to clear my husband's character of the stain which the Scotch Verdict has left on it. Tiger and monkey as he may be, I am ready to run the risk of being introduced to him. And I ask you again—rashly and obstinately as I fear you will think—to give me the introduction. It will put you to no inconvenience. I won't trouble you to escort me ; a letter to Mr. Dexter will do.'

The Major looked piteously at Benjamin, and shook his head. Benjamin looked piteously at the Major, and shook *his* head.

‘She appears to insist on it,’ said the Major.

‘Yes,’ said Benjamin. ‘She appears to insist on it.’

‘I won’t take the responsibility, Mr. Benjamin, of sending her alone to *Miserimus Dexter*.’

‘Shall I go with her, sir?’

The Major reflected. Benjamin, in the capacity of protector, did not appear to inspire our military friend with confidence. After a moment’s consideration, a new idea seemed to strike him. He turned to me.

‘My charming friend,’ he said, ‘be more charming than ever—consent to a compromise. Let us treat this difficulty about *Dexter* from a social point of view. What do you say to a little dinner?’

‘A little dinner?’ I repeated, not in the least understanding him.

‘A little dinner,’ the Major reiterated.

‘At my house. You insist on my introducing you to Dexter ; and I refuse to trust you alone with that crack-brained personage. The only alternative under the circumstances is to invite him to meet you, and to let you form your own opinion of him—under the protection of my roof. Who shall we have to meet you, besides?’ pursued the Major, brightening with hospitable intentions. ‘We want a perfect galaxy of beauty round the table, as a species of compensation, when we have got Miserrimus Dexter for one of the guests. Madame Mirliflore is still in London. You would be sure to like her—she is charming ; she possesses your firmness, your extraordinary tenacity of purpose. Yes, we will have Madame Mirliflore. Who else? Shall we say Lady Clarinda? Another charming person, Mr. Benjamin! You would be sure to admire her—she is so sympathetic, she resembles in so many respects our fair friend here. Yes, Lady Clarinda shall be one of us ; and you shall sit next to her, Mr. Benjamin, as a proof

of my sincere regard for you. Shall we have my young prima donna to sing to us in the evening? I think so. She is pretty; she will assist in obscuring the deformity of Dexter. Very well; there is our party complete; I will shut myself up this evening, and approach the question of dinner with my cook. Shall we say this day week,' asked the Major, taking out his pocket-book—'at eight o'clock?'

I consented to the proposed compromise—but not very willingly. With a letter of introduction, I might have seen Miserrimus Dexter that afternoon. As it was, the 'little dinner' compelled me to wait in absolute inaction, through a whole week. However, there was no help for it but to submit. Major Fitz-David, in his polite way, could be as obstinate as I was. He had evidently made up his mind; and further opposition on my part would be of no service to me.

'Punctually at eight, Mr. Benjamin,' reiterated the Major. 'Put it down in your book.'

Benjamin obeyed—with a side look at me, which I was at no loss to interpret. My good old friend did not relish meeting a man at dinner, who was described as ‘half tiger, half monkey;’ and the privilege of sitting next to Lady Clarinda rather daunted than delighted him. It was all my doing, and he, too, had no choice but to submit. ‘Punctually at eight, sir,’ said poor old Benjamin, obediently recording his formidable engagement. ‘Please to take another glass of wine.’

The Major looked at his watch, and rose—with fluent apologies for abruptly leaving the table.

‘It is later than I thought,’ he said. ‘I have an appointment with a friend—a female friend; a most attractive person. You a little remind me of her, my dear lady—you resemble her in complexion; the same creamy paleness. I adore creamy paleness. As I was saying, I have an appointment with my friend; she does me the honour to ask my opinion on some very remarkable specimens of old lace. I

have studied old lace. I study everything that can make me useful or agreeable to your enchanting sex. You won't forget our little dinner? I will send Dexter his invitation the moment I get home.' He took my hand, and looked at it critically, with his head a little on one side. 'A delicious hand,' he said; 'you don't mind my looking at it, you don't mind my kissing it—do you? A delicious hand is one of my weaknesses. Forgive my weaknesses. I promise to repent and amend, one of these days.'

'At your age, Major, do you think you have much time to lose?' asked a strange voice, speaking behind us.

We all three looked round towards the door. There stood my husband's mother, smiling satirically—with Benjamin's shy little maid-servant waiting to announce her.

Major Fitz-David was ready with his answer. The old soldier was not easily taken by surprise.

'Age, my dear Mrs. Macallan, is

a purely relative expression,' he said. 'There are some people who are never young ; and there are other people who are never old. I am one of the other people. *Au revoir!*'

With that answer, the incorrigible Major kissed the tips of his fingers to us, and walked out. Benjamin, bowing with his old-fashioned courtesy, threw open the door of his little library, and, inviting Mrs. Macallan and myself to pass in, left us together in the room.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## MY MOTHER-IN-LAW SURPRISES ME.

I TOOK a chair at a respectful distance from the sofa on which Mrs. Macallan seated herself. The old lady smiled, and beckoned to me to take my place by her side. Judging by appearances, she had certainly not come to see me in the character of an enemy. It remained to be discovered whether she was really disposed to be my friend.

‘I have received a letter from your uncle, the Vicar,’ she began. ‘He asks me to visit you ; and I am happy—for reasons which you shall presently hear—to comply with his request. Under other circumstances, I doubt very much, my dear child—strange as the confession may appear—



whether I should have ventured into your presence. My son has behaved to you so weakly, and (in my opinion) so inexcusably, that I am really, speaking as his mother, almost ashamed to face you.'

Was she in earnest? I listened to her, and looked at her, in amazement.

'Your uncle's letter,' pursued Mrs. Macallan, 'tells me how you have behaved under your hard trial, and what you propose to do, now Eustace has left you. Doctor Starkweather, poor man, seems inexpressibly shocked by what you said to him when he was in London. He begs me to use my influence to induce you to abandon your present ideas, and to make you return to your old home at the Vicarage. I don't in the least agree with your uncle, my dear! Wild as I believe your plans to be—you have not the slightest chance of succeeding in carrying them out—I admire your courage; your fidelity; your unshaken faith in my unhappy son, after his unpardonable behaviour to you. You are a fine creature, Valeria! And I have come

here to tell you so in plain words. Give me a kiss, child. You deserve to be the wife of a hero—and you have married one of the weakest of living mortals. God forgive me for speaking so of my own son! But it's in my mind, and it must come out!

This way of speaking of Eustace was more than I could suffer—even from his mother. I recovered the use of my tongue, in my husband's defence.

‘I am sincerely proud of your good opinion, dear Mrs. Macallan,’ I said. ‘But you distress me—forgive me if I own it plainly—when I hear you speak so disparagingly of Eustace. I cannot agree with you that my husband is the weakest of living mortals.’

‘Of course not!’ retorted the old lady. ‘You are like all good women—you make a hero of the man you love, whether he deserves it or not. Your husband has hosts of good qualities, child—and perhaps I know them better than you do. But his whole conduct, from the moment

when he first entered your uncle's house to the present time, has been (I say again) the conduct of an essentially weak man. What do you think he has done now by way of climax? He has joined a charitable brotherhood; and he is off to the war in Spain with a red cross on his arm, when he ought to be here on his knees asking his wife to forgive him. I say that is the conduct of a weak man. Some people might call it by a harder name.'

'This news startled and distressed me. I might be resigned to his leaving me (for a time); but all my instincts as a woman revolted at his placing himself in a position of danger, during his separation from his wife. He had now deliberately added to my anxieties. I thought it cruel of him—but I would not confess what I thought to his mother. I affected to be as cool as she was; and I disputed her conclusions with all the firmness that I could summon to help me. The terrible old woman only went on abusing him more vehemently than ever.

‘What I complain of in my son,’ proceeded Mrs. Macallan, ‘is that he has entirely failed to understand you. If he had married a fool, his conduct would be intelligible enough. He would have done wisely to conceal from a fool that he had been married already, and that he had suffered the horrid public exposure of a Trial for the murder of his wife. Then, again, he would have been quite right, when this same fool had discovered the truth, to take himself off out of her way, before she could suspect him of poisoning her—for the sake of the peace and quiet of both parties. But you are not a fool. I can see that, after only a short experience of you. Why can’t he see it, too? Why didn’t he trust you with his secret from the first, instead of stealing his way into your affections under an assumed name? Why did he plan (as he confessed to me) to take you away to the Mediterranean, and to keep you abroad, for fear of some officious friends at home betraying him to you as the prisoner of the famous Trial? What

is the plain answer to all these questions? What is the one possible explanation of this otherwise unaccountable conduct? There is only one answer, and one explanation. My poor wretched son—he takes after his father; he isn't the least like me!—is weak in his way of judging; weak in his way of acting; and, like all weak people, headstrong and unreasonable to the last degree. There is the truth! Don't get red and angry. I am as fond of him as you are. I can see his merits, too. And one of them is, that he has married a woman of spirit and resolution—so faithful, and so fond of him, that she won't even let his own mother tell her of his faults. Good child! I like you for hating me!'

'Dear madam, don't say that I hate you!' I exclaimed (feeling very much as if I did hate her, though, for all that!). 'I only presume to think that you are confusing a delicate-minded man with a weak-minded man. Our dear unhappy Eustace——'

'Is a delicate-minded man,' said the

impenetrable Mrs. Macallan, finishing my sentence for me. 'We will leave it there, my dear, and get on to another subject. I wonder whether we shall disagree about that, too?'

'What is the subject, madam?'

'I won't tell you, if you call me madam. Call me, mother. Say, "What is the subject, mother?"'

'What is the subject, mother?'

'Your notion of turning yourself into a Court of Appeal for a new Trial of Eustace, and forcing the world to pronounce a just verdict on him. Do you really mean to try it?'

'I do!'

Mrs. Macallan considered for a moment grimly with herself.

'You know how heartily I admire your courage, and your devotion to my unfortunate son,' she said. 'You know, by this time, that *I* don't cant. But I cannot see you attempt to perform impossibilities; I cannot let you uselessly risk your reputation and your happiness, without warning

you before it is too late. My child! the thing you have got it in your head to do, is not to be done by you or by anybody. Give it up.'

'I am deeply obliged to you, Mrs. Macallan——'

'Mother!'

'I am deeply obliged to you, mother, for the interest that you take in me—but I cannot give it up. Right or wrong, risk or no risk, I must, and I will, try it!'

Mrs. Macallan looked at me very attentively, and sighed as she looked.

'Oh, youth, youth!' she said to herself, sadly. 'What a grand thing it is to be young!' She controlled the rising regret, and turned on me suddenly, almost fiercely, with these words: 'What, in God's name, do you mean to do?'

At the instant when she put the question, the idea crossed my mind that Mrs. Macallan could introduce me, if she pleased, to Miserrimus Dexter. She must know him, and know him well, as a guest at Gleninch and an old friend of her son.

‘I mean to consult Miserrimus Dexter,’ I answered, boldly.

Mrs. Macallan started back from me, with a loud exclamation of surprise.

‘Are you out of your senses?’ she asked.

I told her, as I had told Major Fitz-David, that I had reason to think Mr. Dexter’s advice might be of real assistance to me at starting.

‘And I,’ rejoined Mrs. Macallan, ‘have reason to think that your whole project is a mad one, and that in asking Dexter’s advice on it you appropriately consult a madman. You needn’t start, child! There is no harm in the creature. I don’t mean that he will attack you, or be rude to you. I only say that the last person whom a young woman, placed in your painful and delicate position, ought to associate herself with, is Miserrimus Dexter.’

Strange! Here was the Major’s warning repeated by Mrs. Macallan, almost in the Major’s own words. Well! It shared the fate of most warnings. It only made me more and more eager to have my own way.



‘You surprise me very much,’ I said. ‘Mr. Dexter’s evidence, given at the Trial, seems as clear and reasonable as evidence can be.’

‘Of course it is!’ answered Mrs. Macallan. ‘The shorthand writers and reporters put his evidence into presentable language, before they printed it. If you had heard what he really said, as I did, you would have been either very much disgusted with him, or very much amused by him, according to your way of looking at things. He began, fairly enough, with a modest explanation of his absurd Christian name, which at once checked the merriment of the audience. But as he went on, the mad side of him showed itself. He mixed up sense and nonsense in the strangest confusion : he was called to order over and over again ; he was even threatened with fine and imprisonment for contempt of Court. In short, he was just like himself—a mixture of the strangest and the most opposite qualities ; at one time, perfectly clear and reasonable, as you said

just now; at another, breaking out into rhapsodies of the most outrageous kind, like a man in a state of delirium. A more entirely unfit person to advise anybody, I tell you again, never lived. You don't expect Me to introduce you to him, I hope?'

'I did think of such a thing,' I answered. 'But, after what you have said, dear Mrs. Macallan, I give up the idea of course. It is not a great sacrifice—it only obliges me to wait a week for Major Fitz-David's dinner party. He has promised to ask Miserrimus Dexter to meet me.'

'There is the Major all over!' cried the old lady. 'If you pin your faith on that man, I pity you. He is as slippery as an eel. I suppose you asked him to introduce you to Dexter?'

'Yes.'

'Exactly! Dexter despises him, my dear. He knows as well as I do that Dexter won't go to his dinner. And he takes that roundabout way of keeping you apart—instead of saying No to you plainly, like an honest man.'

This was bad news. But I was, as usual, too obstinate to own myself defeated.

‘If the worst comes to the worst,’ I said, ‘I can but write to Mr. Dexter, and beg him to grant me an interview.’

‘And go to him by yourself, if he does grant it?’ enquired Mrs. Macallan.

‘Certainly. By myself.’

‘You really mean it?’

‘I do indeed.’

‘I won’t allow you to go by yourself.’

‘May I venture to ask, ma’am, how you propose to prevent me?’

‘By going with you, to be sure, you obstinate hussy! Yes, yes—I can be as headstrong as you are, when I like. Mind! I don’t want to know what your plans are. I don’t want to be mixed up with your plans. My son is resigned to the Scotch Verdict. And I am resigned to the Scotch Verdict. It is you who won’t let matters rest as they are. You are a vain and foolhardy young person. But, somehow, I have

taken a liking to you ; and I won't let you go to Miserrimus Dexter by yourself. Put on your bonnet !'

'Now ?' I asked.

'Certainly ! My carriage is at the door. And the sooner it's over, the better I shall be pleased. Get ready—and be quick about it !'

I required no second bidding. In ten minutes more, we were on our way to Miserrimus Dexter.

Such was the result of my mother-in-law's visit !

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## MISERRIMUS DEXTER—FIRST VIEW.

WE had dawdled over our luncheon, before Mrs. Macallan arrived at Benjamin's cottage. The ensuing conversation between the old lady and myself (of which I have only presented a brief abstract) lasted until quite late in the afternoon. The sun was setting in heavy clouds when we got into the carriage ; and the dreary twilight began to fall round us while we were still on the road.

The direction in which we drove took us (as well as I could judge) towards the great northern suburb of London.

For more than an hour, the carriage threaded its way through a dingy brick labyrinth of streets, growing smaller and

smaller, and dirtier and dirtier, the further we went. Emerging from the labyrinth, I noticed in the gathering darkness dismal patches of waste ground which seemed to be neither town nor country. Crossing these, we passed some forlorn outlying groups of houses with dim little scattered shops among them, looking like lost country villages wandering on the way to London; disfigured and smoke-dried already by their journey! Darker and darker, and drearier and drearier, the prospect grew—until the carriage stopped at last, and Mrs. Macallan announced, in her sharply-satirical way, that we had reached the end of our journey. ‘Prince Dexter’s Palace,’ my dear,’ she said. ‘What do you think of it?’

I looked round me—not knowing what to think of it, if the truth must be told.

We had got out of the carriage, and we were standing on a rough half-made gravel path. Right and left of me, in the dim light, I saw the half-completed foundations of new houses in their first stage of

existence. Boards and bricks were scattered about us. At places, gaunt scaffolding-poles rose like the branchless trees of the brick-desert. Behind us, on the other side of the high road, stretched another plot of waste ground, as yet not built on. Over the surface of this second desert, the ghastly white figures of vagrant ducks gleamed at intervals in the mystic light. In front of us, at a distance of two hundred yards or so, as well as I could calculate, rose a black mass which gradually resolved itself, as my eyes became accustomed to the twilight, into a long, low, and ancient house, with a hedge of evergreens and a pitch-black paling in front of it. The footman led the way towards the paling, through the boards and the bricks, the oyster-shells and the broken crockery, that strewn the ground. And this was 'Prince Dexter's Palace!'

There was a gate in the pitch-black paling, and a bell-handle—discovered with great difficulty. Pulling at the handle, the footman set in motion, to judge by

the sound produced; a bell of prodigious size, fitter for a church than a house.

While we were waiting for admission, Mrs. Macallan pointed to the low dark line of the old building.

‘There is one of his madnesses!’ she said. ‘The speculators in this new neighbourhood have offered him, I don’t know how many thousand pounds for the ground that house stands on. It was originally the manor-house of the district. Dexter purchased it, many years since, in one of his freaks of fancy. He has no old family associations with the place; the walls are all but tumbling about his ears; and the money offered would really be of use to him. But no! He refused the proposal of the enterprising speculators, by letter, in these words: “My house is a standing monument of the picturesque and beautiful, amid the mean, dishonest, and grovelling constructions of a mean, dishonest, and grovelling age. I keep my house, gentlemen, as a useful lesson to you. Look at it, while you are building round



me—and blush, if you can, for your own work.” Was there ever such an absurd letter written yet? Hush! I hear footsteps in the garden. Here comes his cousin. His cousin is a woman. I may as well tell you that, or you might mistake her for a man, in the dark.’

A rough deep voice, which I should certainly never have supposed to be the voice of a woman, hailed us from the inner side of the paling.

‘Who’s there?’

‘Mrs. Macallan,’ answered my mother-in-law.

‘What do you want?’

‘We want to see Dexter.’

‘You can’t see him.’

‘Why not?’

‘What did you say your name was?’

‘Macallan. Mrs. Macallan. Eustace Macallan’s mother. *Now* do you understand?’

The voice muttered and grunted behind the paling, and a key turned in the lock of the gate.

Admitted to the garden, in the deep shadow of the shrubs, I could see nothing distinctly of the woman with the rough voice, except that she wore a man's hat. Closing the gate behind us, without a word of welcome or explanation, she led the way to the house. Mrs. Macallan followed her easily, knowing the place; and I walked in Mrs. Macallan's footsteps as closely as I could. 'This is a nice family,' my mother-in-law whispered to me. 'Dexter's cousin is the only woman in the house, and Dexter's cousin is an idiot.'

We entered a spacious hall, with a low ceiling—dimly lit at its further end by one small oil lamp. I could see that there were pictures on the grim brown walls—but the subjects represented were invisible in the obscure and shadowy light.

Mrs. Macallan addressed herself to the speechless cousin with the man's hat.

'Now tell me,' she said. 'Why can't we see Dexter?'

The cousin took a sheet of paper off the hall table, and handed it to Mrs. Macallan.

‘The Master’s writing!’ said this strange creature, in a hoarse whisper, as if the bare idea of ‘the Master’ terrified her. ‘Read it. And stay, or go, which you please.’

She opened an invisible side-door in the wall, masked by one of the pictures—disappeared through it like a ghost—and left us together, alone in the hall.

Mrs. Macallan approached the oil lamp, and looked by its light at the sheet of paper which the woman had given to her. I followed, and peeped over her shoulder, without ceremony. The paper exhibited written characters, traced in a wonderfully large and firm handwriting. Had I caught the infection of madness in the air of the house? Or did I really see before me these words?

‘NOTICE.—My immense imagination is at work. Visions of heroes unroll themselves before me. I re-animate in myself

the spirits of the departed great. My brains are boiling in my head. Any persons who disturb me, under existing circumstances, will do it at the peril of their lives.—DEXTER.'

Mrs. Macallan looked round at me quietly with her sardonic smile.

'Do you still persist in wanting to be introduced to him?' she asked.

The mockery in the tone of the question roused my pride. I determined that I would not be the first to give way.

'Not if I am putting you in peril of your life, ma'am,' I answered, pertly enough, pointing to the paper in her hand.

My mother-in-law returned to the hall-table, and put the paper back on it, without condescending to reply. She then led the way to an arched recess on our right hand, beyond which I dimly discerned a broad flight of oaken stairs.

'Follow me,' said Mrs. Macallan, mounting the stairs in the dark. 'I know where to find him.'

We groped our way up the stairs to

the first landing. The next flight of steps, turning in the reverse direction, was faintly illuminated, like the hall below, by one oil lamp, placed in some invisible position above us. Ascending the second flight of stairs, and crossing a short corridor, we discovered the lamp, through the open door of a quaintly-shaped circular room, burning on the mantelpiece. Its light illuminated a strip of thick tapestry, hanging loose from the ceiling to the floor, on the wall opposite to the door by which we had entered.

Mrs. Macallan drew aside the strip of tapestry, and, signing to me to follow her, passed behind it.

‘Listen!’ she whispered.

Standing on the inner side of the tapestry, I found myself in a dark recess or passage, at the end of which a ray of light from the lamp showed me a closed door. I listened, and heard, on the other side of the door, a shouting voice, accompanied by an extraordinary rumbling and whistling sound travelling backwards

and forwards, as well as I could judge, over a great space. Now the rumbling and the whistling would reach their climax of loudness, and would overcome the resonant notes of the shouting voice. Then, again, those louder sounds gradually retreated into distance, and the shouting voice made itself heard as the more audible sound of the two. The door must have been of prodigious solidity. Listen as intently as I might, I failed to catch the articulate words (if any) which the voice was pronouncing, and I was equally at a loss to penetrate the cause which produced the rumbling and whistling sounds.

‘What can possibly be going on,’ I whispered to Mrs. Macallan, ‘on the other side of that door?’

‘Step softly,’ my mother-in-law answered, ‘and come and see.’

She arranged the tapestry behind us, so as completely to shut out the light in the circular room. Then, noiselessly turning the handle, she opened the heavy door.

We kept ourselves concealed in the shadow of the recess, and looked through the open doorway.

I saw (or fancied I saw, in the obscurity,) a long room, with a low ceiling. The dying gleam of an ill-kept fire formed the only light by which I could judge of objects and distances. Redly illuminating the central portion of the room, opposite to which we were standing, the firelight left the extremities shadowed in almost total darkness. I had barely time to notice this, before I heard the rumbling and whistling sounds approaching me. A high chair on wheels moved by, through the field of red light, carrying a shadowy figure with floating hair, and arms furiously raised and lowered, working the machinery that propelled the chair at its utmost rate of speed. 'I am Napoleon, at the sunrise of Austerlitz!' shouted the man in the chair as he swept past me, on his rumbling and whistling wheels, in the red glow of the firelight. 'I give the word; and thrones rock, and kings fall, and nations

tremble, and men by tens of thousands fight and bleed and die!’ The chair rushed out of sight, and the shouting man in it became another hero. ‘I am Nelson!’ the ringing voice cried now. ‘I am leading the fleet at Trafalgar. I issue my commands, prophetically conscious of victory and death. I see my own apotheosis—my public funeral, my nation’s tears, my burial in the glorious church. The ages remember me, and the poets sing my praise in immortal verse!’ The strident wheels turned at the far end of the room, and came back. The fantastic and frightful apparition, man and machinery blended in one—the new Centaur, half man, half chair—flew by me again in the dying light. ‘I am Shakspeare!’ cried the frantic creature, now. ‘I am writing “Lear,” the tragedy of tragedies. Ancients and moderns, I am the poet who towers over them all. Light! light! the lines flow out like lava from the eruption of my volcanic mind. Light! light! for the poet of all time to write the words



that live for ever!’ He ground and tore his way back towards the middle of the room. As he approached the fireplace, a last morsel of unburnt coal (or wood) burst into momentary flame, and showed the open doorway. In that moment, he saw us! The wheel-chair stopped with a shock that shook the crazy old floor of the room, altered its course, and flew at us with the rush of a wild animal. We drew back, just in time to escape it, against the wall of the recess. The chair passed on, and burst aside the hanging tapestry. The light of the lamp in the circular room poured in through the gap. The creature in the chair checked his furious wheels, and looked back over his shoulder with an impish curiosity horrible to see.

‘Have I run over them? Have I ground them to powder for presuming to intrude on me?’ he said to himself. As the expression of this amiable doubt passed his lips, his eyes lighted on us. His mind instantly veered back again to Shakspeare

and 'King Lear.' 'Goneril and Regan!' he cried. 'My two unnatural daughters, my she-devil children, come to mock at me!'

'Nothing of the sort,' said my mother-in-law, as quietly as if she was addressing a perfectly reasonable being, 'I am your old friend, Mrs. Macallan; and I have brought Eustace Macallan's second wife to see you.'

The instant she pronounced those last words, 'Eustace Macallan's second wife,' the man in the chair sprang out of it with a shrill cry of horror, as if she had shot him. For one moment we saw a head and body in the air, absolutely deprived of the lower limbs. The moment after, the terrible creature touched the floor as lightly as a monkey, on his hands. The grotesque horror of the scene culminated in his hopping away, on his hands, at a prodigious speed, until he reached the fireplace in the long room. There he crouched over the dying embers, shuddering and shivering, and muttering, 'Oh,

pity me, pity me !' dozens and dozens of times over to himself.

This was the man whose advice I had come to ask—whose assistance I had confidently counted on, in my hour of need !

## CHAPTER XXV.

## MISERRIMUS DEXTER—SECOND VIEW.

THOROUGHLY disheartened and disgusted, and (if I must honestly confess it) thoroughly frightened too, I whispered to Mrs. Macallan, 'I was wrong, and you were right. Let us go.'

The ears of Miserrimus Dexter must have been as sensitive as the ears of a dog. He heard me say, 'Let us go.'

'No!' he answered. 'Bring Eustace Macallan's second wife in here. I am a gentleman—I must apologise to her. I am a student of human character—I wish to see her.'

The whole man appeared to have undergone a complete transformation. He spoke in the gentlest of voices—and he

sighed hysterically when he had done, like a woman recovering from a burst of tears. Was it reviving courage or reviving curiosity? When Mrs. Macallan said to me, 'The fit is over now; do you still wish to go away?' I answered, 'No; I am ready to go in.'

'Have you recovered your belief in him, already?' asked my mother-in-law, in her mercilessly satirical way.

'I have recovered from my terror of him,' I replied.

'I am sorry I terrified you,' said the soft voice at the fireplace. 'Some people think I am a little mad at times. You came, I suppose, at one of the times—if some people are right. I admit that I am a visionary. My imagination runs away with me, and I say and do strange things. On those occasions, anybody who reminds me of that horrible Trial, throws me back into the past, and causes me unutterable nervous suffering. I am a very tender-hearted man. As the necessary consequence (in such a world as this), I am a

miserable wretch. Accept my excuses. Come in, both of you. Come in, and pity me.'

A child would not have been frightened of him now. A child would have gone in, and pitied him.

The room was getting darker and darker. We could just see the crouching figure of Miserrimus Dexter at the expiring fire—and that was all.

'Are we to have no light?' asked Mrs. Macallan. 'And is this lady to see you, when the light comes, out of your chair?'

He lifted something bright and metallic, hanging round his neck, and blew on it a series of shrill, trilling, birdlike notes. After an interval, he was answered by a similar series of notes, sounding faintly in some distant region of the house.

'Ariel is coming,' he said. 'Compose yourself, Mama Macallan, Ariel will make me presentable to a lady's eyes.'

He hopped away on his hands into the darkness at the end of the room. 'Wait a little,' said Mrs. Macallan; 'and you will

have another surprise—you will see the “delicate Ariel.”’

We heard heavy footsteps in the circular room.

‘Ariel!’ sighed Miserrimus Dexter out of the darkness, in his softest notes.

To my astonishment, the coarse masculine voice of the cousin in the man’s hat—the Caliban’s, rather than the Ariel’s voice—answered, ‘Here!’

‘My chair, Ariel!’

The person thus strangely misnamed drew aside the tapestry, so as to let in more light—then entered the room, pushing the wheeled chair before her. She stooped, and lifted Miserrimus Dexter from the floor, like a child. Before she could put him into the chair, he sprang out of her arms with a little gleeful cry, and alighted on his seat, like a bird alighting on its perch!

‘The lamp,’ said Miserrimus Dexter. ‘And the looking-glass. Pardon me,’ he added, addressing us, ‘for turning my back on you. You musn’t see me until my hair

is set to rights. Ariel! the brush, the comb, and the perfumes.'

Carrying the lamp in one hand, the looking-glass in the other, and the brush (with the comb stuck in it) between her teeth, Ariel the Second, otherwise Dexter's cousin, presented herself plainly before me for the first time. I could now see the girl's round fleshy inexpressive face, her rayless and colourless eyes, her coarse nose and heavy chin. A creature half alive; an imperfectly-developed animal in shapeless form, clad in a man's pilot jacket, and treading in a man's heavy laced boots: with nothing but an old red flannel petticoat, and a broken comb in her frowsy flaxen hair, to tell us that she was a woman—such was the inhospitable person who had received us in the darkness, when we first entered the house.

This wonderful valet, collecting her materials for dressing her still more wonderful master's hair, gave him the looking-glass (a hand-mirror), and addressed herself to her work.



She combed, she brushed, she oiled, she perfumed the flowing locks and the long silky beard of Miserrimus Dexter, with the strangest mixture of dulness and dexterity that I ever saw. Done in brute silence, with a lumpish look and a clumsy gait, the work was perfectly well done, nevertheless. The imp in the chair superintended the whole proceeding critically by means of his hand-mirror. He was too deeply interested in this occupation to speak, until some of the concluding touches to his beard brought the misnamed Ariel in front of him, and so turned her full face towards the part of the room in which Mrs. Macallan and I were standing. Then he addressed us—taking special care, however, not to turn his head our way while his toilet was still incomplete.

‘Mama Macallan,’ he said, ‘what is the Christian name of your son’s second wife?’

‘Why do you want to know?’ asked my mother-in-law.

‘I want to know, because I can’t address her as “Mrs. Eustace Macallan.”’

‘Why not?’

‘It recalls *the other* Mrs. Eustace Macallan. If I am reminded of those horrible days at Gleninch, my fortitude will give way—I shall burst out screaming again.’

Hearing this, I hastened to interpose.

‘My name is Valeria,’ I said.

‘A Roman name,’ remarked Miserrimus Dexter. ‘I like it. My own name has a Roman ring in it. My bodily build would have been Roman, if I had been born with legs. I shall call you, Mrs. Valeria. Unless you disapprove of it?’

I hastened to say that I was far from disapproving of it.

‘Very good,’ said Miserrimus Dexter. ‘Mrs. Valeria, do you see the face of this creature in front of me?’

He pointed with the hand-mirror to his cousin, as unconcernedly as he might have pointed to a dog. His cousin, on her side, took no more notice than a dog would have taken of the contemptuous phrase by which he had designated her. She went on comb-

ing and oiling his beard as composedly as ever.

‘It is the face of an idiot, isn’t it?’ pursued Miserrimus Dexter. ‘Look at her! She is a mere vegetable. A cabbage in a garden has as much life and expression in it as that girl exhibits at the present moment. Would you believe there was latent intelligence, affection, pride, fidelity, in such a half-developed being as this?’

I was really ashamed to answer him. Quite needlessly! The impenetrable young woman went on with her master’s beard. A machine could not have taken less notice of the life and the talk around it than this incomprehensible creature.

‘*I* have got at that latent affection, pride, fidelity, and the rest of it,’ resumed Miserrimus Dexter. ‘*I* hold the key to that dormant Intelligence. Grand thought! Now look at her, when I speak. (I named her, poor wretch, in one of my ironical moments. She has got to like her name, just as a dog gets to like his collar.) Now, Mrs. Valeria, look and listen. Ariel!’

The girl's dull face began to brighten. The girl's mechanically-moving hand stopped, and held the comb in suspense.

‘Ariel! you have learnt to dress my hair, and anoint my beard—haven't you?’

Her face still brightened. ‘Yes! yes! yes!’ she answered, eagerly. ‘And you say I have learnt to do it well—don't you?’

‘I say that. Would you like to let anybody else do it for you?’

Her eyes melted softly into light and life. Her strange unwomanly voice sank to the gentlest tones that I had heard from her yet.

‘Nobody else shall do it for me,’ she said, at once proudly and tenderly. ‘Nobody, as long as I live, shall touch you but me.’

‘Not even the lady there?’ asked Miserrimus Dexter, pointing backward with his hand-mirror to the place at which I was standing.

Her eyes suddenly flashed, her hand

suddenly shook the comb at me, in a burst of jealous rage.

‘Let her try!’ cried the poor creature, raising her voice again to its hoarsest notes. ‘Let her touch you if she dares!’

Dexter laughed at the childish outbreak. ‘That will do, my delicate Ariel,’ he said. ‘I dismiss your Intelligence for the present. Relapse into your former self. Finish my beard.’

She passively resumed her work. The new light in her eyes, the new expression in her face, faded little by little, and died out. In another minute, the face was as vacant and as lumpish as before: the hands did their work again with the lifeless dexterity which had so painfully impressed me when she first took up the brush. Miserrimus Dexter appeared to be perfectly satisfied with these results.

‘I thought my little experiment might interest you,’ he said. ‘You see how it is? The dormant intelligence of my curious cousin is like the dormant sound in a musi-

cal instrument. I play upon it—and it answers to my touch. She likes being played upon. But her great delight is to hear me tell a story. I puzzle her to the verge of distraction ; and the more I confuse her, the better she likes the story. It is the greatest fun ; you really must see it some day.’ He indulged himself in a last look at the mirror. ‘ Ah ! ’ he said complacently, ‘ now I shall do. Vanish, Ariel ! ’

She tramped out of the room in her heavy boots, with the mute obedience of a trained animal. I said ‘ Good night ’ as she passed me. She neither returned the salutation nor looked at me : the words simply produced no effect on her dull senses. The one voice that could reach her was silent. She had relapsed once more into the vacant inanimate creature who had opened the gate to us—until it pleased Miserrimus Dexter to speak to her again.

‘ Valeria ! ’ said my mother-in-law. ‘ Our modest host is waiting to see what you think of him.’

While my attention was fixed on his cousin, he had wheeled his chair round, so as to face me—with the light of the lamp falling full on him. In mentioning his appearance as a witness at the Trial, I find I have borrowed (without meaning to do so) from my experience of him at this later time. I saw plainly now the bright intelligent face, and the large clear blue eyes ; the lustrous waving hair of a light chestnut colour ; the long delicate white hands, and the magnificent throat and chest, which I have elsewhere described. The deformity which degraded and destroyed the manly beauty of his head and breast, was hidden from view by an Oriental robe of many colours, thrown over the chair like a coverlid. He was clothed in a jacket of black velvet, fastened loosely across his chest with large malachite buttons ; and he wore lace ruffles at the ends of his sleeves, in the fashion of the last century. It may well have been due to want of perception on my part—but I could see nothing mad in him, nothing in any way

repelling, as he now looked at me. The one defect that I could discover in his face was at the outer corners of his eyes, just under the temple. Here, when he laughed, and, in a lesser degree, when he smiled, the skin contracted into quaint little wrinkles and folds, which looked strangely out of harmony with the almost youthful appearance of the rest of his face. As to his other features, the mouth, so far as his beard and moustache permitted me to see it, was small and delicately formed. The nose—perfectly shaped on the straight Grecian model—was perhaps a little too thin, judged by comparison with the full cheeks and the high massive forehead. Looking at him as a whole (and speaking of him, of course, from a woman's, not a physiognomist's, point of view), I can only describe him as being an unusually handsome man. A painter would have revelled in him as a model for St. John. And a young girl, ignorant of what the Oriental robe hid from view, would have said to herself the instant she looked at him, 'Here is the hero of my dreams !'



‘Well, Mrs. Valeria,’ he said, quietly, ‘do I frighten you now?’

‘Certainly not, Mr. Dexter.’

His blue eyes—large as the eyes of a woman, clear as the eyes of a child—rested on my face with a strangely varying play of expression, which at once interested and perplexed me.

Now, there was doubt, uneasy painful doubt, in the look: and now again it changed brightly to approval, so open and unrestrained that a vain woman might have fancied she had made a conquest of him at first sight. Suddenly, a new emotion seemed to take possession of him. His eyes sank, his head drooped; he lifted his hands with a gesture of regret. He muttered and murmured to himself; pursuing some secret and melancholy train of thought, which seemed to lead him further and further away from present objects of interest, and to plunge him deeper and deeper in troubled recollections of the past. Here and there, I caught some of the words. Little by little, I found myself

trying to fathom what was darkly passing in this strange man's mind.

‘A far more charming face,’ I heard him say. ‘But no—not a more beautiful figure. What figure was ever more beautiful than hers? Something—but not all—of her enchanting grace. Where is the resemblance which has brought her back to me? In the pose of the figure, perhaps? In the movement of the figure, perhaps? Poor martyred angel! What a life! And what a death! what a death!’

Was he comparing me with the victim of the poison—with my husband's first wife? His words seemed to justify the conclusion. If I was right, the dead woman had been evidently a favourite with him. There was no misinterpreting the broken tones of his voice when he spoke of her; he had admired her, living; he mourned her, dead. Supposing that I could prevail upon myself to admit this extraordinary person into my confidence, what would be the result? Should I be

the gainer or the loser by the resemblance which he fancied he had discovered? Would the sight of me console him? or pain him? I waited eagerly to hear more on the subject of the first wife. Not a word more escaped his lips. A new change came over him. He lifted his head with a start, and looked about him, as a weary man might look if he was suddenly disturbed in a deep sleep.

‘What have I done?’ he said. ‘Have I been letting my mind drift again?’ He shuddered, and sighed. ‘Oh, that house of Gleninch!’ he murmured sadly to himself. ‘Shall I never get away from it in my thoughts? Oh, that house of Gleninch!’

To my infinite disappointment, Mrs. Macallan checked the further revelation of what was passing in his mind.

Something in the tone and manner of his allusion to her son’s country house seemed to have offended her. She interposed sharply and decisively.

‘Gently, my friend, gently!’ she said. ‘I don’t think you quite know what you are talking about.’

His great blue eyes flashed at her fiercely. With one turn of his hand, he brought his chair close at her side. The next instant he caught her by the arm, and forced her to bend to him, until he could whisper in her ear. He was violently agitated. His whisper was loud enough to make itself heard where I was sitting at the time.

‘I don’t know what I am talking about?’ he repeated—with his eyes fixed attentively, not on my mother-in-law, but on me. ‘You short-sighted old woman! where are your spectacles? Look at her! Do you see no resemblance—the figure, not the face!—do you see no resemblance there to Eustace’s first wife?’

‘Pure fancy!’ rejoined Mrs. Macallan. ‘I see nothing of the sort.’

He shook her impatiently.

‘Not so loud,’ he whispered. ‘She will hear you.’

‘I have heard you both,’ I said. ‘You need have no fear, Mr. Dexter, of speaking before me. I know that my husband had a first wife ; and I know how miserably she died. I have read the Trial.’

‘You have read the life and death of a martyr!’ cried Miserrimus Dexter. He suddenly wheeled his chair my way ; he bent over me, almost tenderly ; his eyes filled with tears. ‘Nobody appreciated her at her true value,’ he said, ‘but me. Nobody but me ! nobody but me !’

Mrs. Macallan walked away impatiently to the end of the room.

‘When you are ready, Valeria, I am,’ she said. ‘We cannot keep the servants and the horses waiting much longer in this bleak place.’

I was too deeply interested in leading Miserrimus Dexter to pursue the subject on which he had touched, to be willing to leave him at that moment. I pretended not to have heard Mrs. Macallan. I laid my hand, as if by accident, on the wheel-chair to keep him near me.

‘You showed how highly you esteemed that poor lady in your evidence at the Trial,’ I said. ‘I believe, Mr. Dexter, you have ideas of your own about the mystery of her death?’

He had been looking at my hand, resting on the arm of his chair, until I ventured on my question. At that, he suddenly raised his eyes, and fixed them with a frowning and furtive suspicion on my face.

‘How do you know I have ideas of my own?’ he asked, sternly.

‘I know it from reading the Trial,’ I answered. ‘The lawyer who cross-examined you spoke almost in the very words which I have just used. I had no intention of offending you, Mr. Dexter.’

His face cleared as rapidly as it had clouded. He smiled, and laid his hand on mine. His touch struck me cold. I felt every nerve in me shivering under it—I drew my hand away quickly.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, ‘if I have misunderstood you. I *have* ideas of my own, about that unhappy lady.’ He

paused, and looked at me in silence, very earnestly. ‘Have *you* any ideas?’ he asked. ‘Ideas about her life? or about her death?’

I was deeply interested; I was burning to hear more. It might encourage him to speak if I was candid with him. I answered, ‘Yes.’

‘Ideas which you have mentioned to anyone?’ he went on.

‘To no living creature,’ I replied—‘as yet.’

‘This is very strange!’ he said, still earnestly reading my face. ‘What interest can *you* have in a dead woman whom you never knew? Why did you ask me that question, just now? Have you any motive in coming here to see me?’

I boldly acknowledged the truth. I said, ‘I have a motive.’

‘Is it connected with Eustace Macallan’s first wife?’

‘It is.’

‘With anything that happened in her lifetime?’

‘No.’

‘With her death?’

‘Yes.’

He suddenly clasped his hands, with a wild gesture of despair—and then pressed them both on his head, as if he was struck by some sudden pain.

‘I can’t hear it to-night!’ he said; ‘I would give worlds to hear it—but I daren’t; I should lose all hold over myself in the state I am in now. I am not equal to raking up the horror and the mystery of the past; I have not courage enough to open the grave of the martyred dead. Did you hear me, when you came here? I have an immense imagination. It runs riot at times. It makes an actor of me. I play the parts of all the heroes that ever lived. I feel their characters. I merge myself in their individualities. For the time, I *am* the man I fancy myself to be. I can’t help it. I am obliged to do it. If I restrained my imagination, when the fit is on me, I should go mad. I let myself loose. It lasts for hours. It leaves me, with my



energies worn out, with my sensibilities frightfully acute. Rouse any melancholy or terrible associations in me, at such times; and I am capable of hysterics, I am capable of screaming. You heard me scream. You shall *not* see me in hysterics. No, Mrs. Valeria—no, your innocent reflection of the dead and gone—I would not frighten you for the world. Will you come here to-morrow in the day-time? I have got a chaise and a pony. Ariel, my delicate Ariel, can drive. She shall call at Mama Macallan's and fetch you. We will talk to-morrow, when I am fit for it. I am dying to hear you. I will be fit for you in the morning. I will be civil, intelligent, communicative in the morning. No more of it now! Away with the subject! The too-exciting, the too-interesting subject! I must compose myself, or my brains will explode in my head. Music is the true narcotic for excitable brains. My harp! my harp!

He rushed away in his chair to the far end of the room—passing Mrs. Macallan

as she returned to me, bent on hastening our departure.

‘Come!’ said the old lady, irritably. ‘You have seen him, and he has made a good show of himself. More of him might be tiresome. Come away.’

The chair returned to us more slowly. Miserrimus Dexter was working it with one hand only. In the other, he held a harp, of a pattern which I had hitherto only seen in pictures. The strings were few in number; and the instrument was so small that I could have held it easily on my lap. It was the ancient harp of the pictured Muses and the legendary Welsh Bards.

‘Good night, Dexter,’ said Mrs. Macallan.

He held up one hand imperatively.

‘Wait!’ he said. ‘Let her hear me sing.’ He turned to me. ‘I decline to be indebted to other people for my poetry and my music,’ he went on. ‘I compose my own poetry, and my own music. I improvise. Give me a moment to think. I will improvise for You.’

He closed his eyes, and rested his head on the frame of the harp. His fingers gently touched the strings while he was thinking. In a few minutes he lifted his head, looked at me, and struck the first notes—the prelude to the song.

Was it good music ? or bad ? I cannot decide whether it was music at all. It was a wild barbaric succession of sounds ; utterly unlike any modern composition. Sometimes, it suggested a slow and undulating Oriental dance. Sometimes it modulated into tones which reminded me of the severer harmonies of the old Gregorian chants. The words, when they followed the prelude, were as wild, as recklessly free from all restraint of critical rules, as the music. They were assuredly inspired by the occasion ; I was the theme of the strange song. And thus—in one of the finest tenor voices I ever heard—my poet sang of me :

Why does she come ?  
She reminds me of the lost ;  
She reminds me of the dead :  
In her form like the other,  
In her walk like the other :  
Why does she come ?

Does Destiny bring her?  
Shall we range together  
The mazes of the past?  
Shall we search together  
The secrets of the past?  
Shall we interchange thoughts, surmises, suspicions?  
Does Destiny bring her?

The Future will show.  
Let the night pass;  
Let the day come.  
I shall see into Her mind:  
She will look into Mine.  
The Future will show.

His voice sank, his fingers touched the strings more and more feebly as he approached the last lines. The over-wrought brain needed, and took, its re-animating repose. At the final words, his eyes slowly closed. His head lay back on the chair. He slept with his arms round his harp, as a child sleeps, hugging its last new toy.

We stole out of the room on tiptoe, and left Miserrimus Dexter—poet, composer, and madman—in his peaceful sleep.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## MORE OF MY OBSTINACY.

ARIEL was downstairs in the shadowy hall, half asleep, half awake, waiting to see the visitors clear of the house. Without speaking to us, without looking at us, she led the way down the dark garden walk, and locked the gate behind us. 'Good night, Ariel,' I called out to her over the paling. Nothing answered me but the tramp of her heavy footsteps returning to the house, and the dull thump, a moment afterwards, of the closing door.

The footman had thoughtfully lit the carriage lamps. Carrying one of them to serve as a lantern, he lighted us over the wilds of the brick-desert, and landed us safely on the path by the high road.

‘Well!’ said my mother-in-law, when we were comfortably seated in the carriage again. ‘You have seen Miserrimus Dexter; and I hope you are satisfied. I will do him the justice to declare that I never, in all my experience, saw him more completely crazy than he was to-night. What do *you* say?’

‘I don’t presume to dispute your opinion,’ I answered. ‘But, speaking for myself, I am not quite sure that he is mad.’

‘Not mad!’ cried Mrs. Macallan, ‘after those frantic performances in his chair? Not mad, after the exhibition he made of his unfortunate cousin? Not mad, after the song that he sang in your honour, and the falling asleep by way of conclusion? Oh, Valeria! Valeria! Well said the wisdom of our ancestors—there are none so blind as those who won’t see!’

‘Pardon me, dear Mrs. Macallan—I saw everything that you mention; and I never felt more surprised, or more confounded, in my life. But now I have re-

covered from my amazement, and can think over it quietly, I must still venture to doubt whether this strange man is really mad, in the true meaning of the word. It seems to me that he openly expresses—I admit in a very reckless and boisterous way—thoughts and feelings which most of us are ashamed of as weaknesses, and which we keep to ourselves accordingly. I confess I have often fancied myself transformed into some other person, and have felt a certain pleasure in seeing myself in my new character. One of our first amusements as children (if we have any imagination at all) is to get out of our own characters, and to try the characters of other personages as a change—to be fairies, to be queens, to be anything, in short, but what we really are. Mr. Dexter lets out the secret, just as the children do—and, if that is madness, he is certainly mad. But I noticed that when his imagination cooled down, he became Miserrimus Dexter again—he no more believed himself, than we believed him, to be Napoleon or Shakspeare.

Besides, some allowance is surely to be made for the solitary, sedentary life that he leads. I am not learned enough to trace the influence of that life in making him what he is. But I think I can see the result in an over-excited imagination ; and I fancy I can trace his exhibiting his power over the poor cousin, and his singing of that wonderful song, to no more formidable cause than inordinate self-conceit. I hope the confession will not lower me seriously in your good opinion—but I must say I have enjoyed my visit ; and, worse still, Miserrimus Dexter really interests me !’

‘ Does this learned discourse on Dexter mean that you are going to see him again ? ’ asked Mrs. Macallan.

‘ I don’t know how I may feel about it to-morrow morning,’ I said. ‘ But my impulse at this moment is decidedly to see him again. I had a little talk with him, while you were away at the other end of the room ; and I believe he really can be of use to me——’



‘Of use to you, in what?’ interposed my mother-in-law.

‘In the one object which I have in view—the object, dear Mrs. Macallan, which I regret to say you do not approve.’

‘And you are going to take him into your confidence? to open your whole mind to such a man as the man we have just left?’

‘Yes—if I think of it to-morrow, as I think of it to-night. I dare say it is a risk; but I must run risks. I know I am not prudent; but prudence won’t help a woman in my position, with my end to gain.’

Mrs. Macallan made no further remonstrance, in words. She opened a capacious pocket in front of the carriage, and took from it a box of matches and a railway reading-lamp.

‘You provoke me,’ said the old lady, ‘into showing you what your husband thinks of this new whim of yours. I have got his letter with me—his last letter from Spain. You shall judge for yourself, you

poor deluded young creature, whether my son is worthy of the sacrifice, the useless and hopeless sacrifice, which you are bent on making of yourself, for his sake. Strike a light !'

I willingly obeyed her. Ever since she had informed me of Eustace's departure to Spain, I had been eager for more news of him—for something to sustain my spirits, after so much that had disappointed and depressed me. Thus far, I did not even know whether my husband thought of me sometimes in his self-imposed exile. As to his regretting already the rash act which had separated us, it was still too soon to begin hoping for that.

The lamp having been lit, and fixed in its place between the two front windows of the carriage, Mrs. Macallan produced her son's letter. There is no folly like the folly of love. It cost me a hard struggle to restrain myself from kissing the paper on which the dear hand had rested.

'There !' said my mother-in-law. 'Begin on the second page ; the page

devoted to you. Read straight down to the last line at the bottom—and, in God's name, come back to your senses, child, before it is too late !'

I followed my instructions, and read these words :

'Can I trust myself to write of Valeria ? I *must* write of her ! Tell me how she is, how she looks, what she is doing. I am always thinking of her. Not a day passes but I mourn the loss of her. Oh, if she had only been contented to let matters rest as they were ! Oh, if she had never discovered the miserable truth !

'She spoke of reading the Trial, when I saw her last. Has she persisted in doing so ? I believe—I say this seriously, mother—I believe the shame and the horror of it would have been the death of me, if I had met her face to face, when she first knew of the ignominy that I have suffered, of the infamous suspicion of which I have been publicly made the subject. Think of those pure eyes looking at a man who has been accused (and never wholly

absolved) of the foulest and the vilest of all murders—and then think of what that man must feel, if he has any heart and any sense of shame left in him. I sicken as I write of it.

‘ Does she still meditate that hopeless project—the offspring, poor angel, of her artless, unthinking generosity? Does she still fancy that it is in *her* power to assert my innocence before the world? Oh, mother (if she does), use your utmost influence to make her give up the idea! Spare her the humiliation, the disappointment, the insult perhaps, to which she may innocently expose herself. For her sake, for my sake, leave no means untried to attain this righteous, this merciful end.

‘ I send her no message—I dare not do it. Say nothing when you see her, which can recall me to her memory. On the contrary, help her to forget me as soon as possible. The kindest thing I can do—the one atonement I can make to her—is to drop out of her life.’

With those wretched words it ended.

I handed his letter back to his mother in silence. She said but little, on her side.

‘If *this* doesn’t discourage you,’ she remarked, slowly folding up the letter, ‘nothing will. Let us leave it there, and say no more.’

I made no answer—I was crying behind my veil. My domestic prospect looked so dreary ; my unfortunate husband was so hopelessly misguided, so pitiably wrong ! The one chance for both of us (and the one consolation for poor Me) was to hold by my desperate resolution more firmly than ever. If I had wanted anything to confirm me in this view, and to arm me against the remonstrances of every one of my friends, Eustace’s letter would have proved more than sufficient to answer the purpose. At least, he had not forgotten me ; he thought of me, and he mourned the loss of me, every day of his life. That was encouragement enough—for the present. ‘If Ariel calls for me in the pony-chaise to-morrow,’ I thought to myself, ‘with Ariel I go.’

Mrs. Macallan set me down at Benjamin's door.

I mentioned to her, at parting—I stood sufficiently in awe of her to put it off till the last moment—that Miserrimus Dexter had arranged to send his cousin and his pony-chaise to her residence, on the next day; and I enquired thereupon whether my mother-in-law would permit me to call at her house to wait for the appearance of the cousin, or whether she would prefer sending the chaise on to Benjamin's cottage. I fully expected an explosion of anger to follow this bold avowal of my plans for the next day. The old lady agreeably surprised me. She proved that she had really taken a liking to me: she kept her temper.

‘If you persist in going back to Dexter, you certainly shall not go to him from my door,’ she said. ‘But I hope you will *not* persist. I hope you will wake a wiser woman to-morrow morning.’

The morning came. A little before noon, the arrival of the pony-chaise was an-

nounced at the door, and a letter was brought in to me from Mrs. Macallan.

‘I have no right to control your movements,’ my mother-in-law wrote. ‘I send the chaise to Mr. Benjamin’s house; and I sincerely trust that you will not take your place in it. I wish I could persuade you, Valeria, how truly I am your friend. I have been thinking about you anxiously in the wakeful hours of the night. *How* anxiously, you will understand, when I tell you that I now reproach myself for not having done more than I did to prevent your unhappy marriage. And yet, what I could have done I don’t really know. My son admitted to me that he was courting you under an assumed name—but he never told me what the name was, or who you were, or where your friends lived. Perhaps, I ought to have taken measures to find this out. Perhaps, if I had succeeded, I ought to have interfered and enlightened you, even at the sad sacrifice of making an enemy of my own son. I honestly thought

I did my duty in expressing my disapproval, and in refusing to be present at the marriage. Was I too easily satisfied? It is too late to ask. Why do I trouble you with an old woman's vain misgivings and regrets? My child, if you come to any harm, I shall feel (indirectly) responsible for it. It is this uneasy state of mind which sets me writing, with nothing to say that can interest you. Don't go to Dexter! The fear has been pursuing me all night that your going to Dexter will end badly. Write him an excuse. Valeria! I firmly believe you will repent it if you return to that house.'

Was ever a woman more plainly warned, more carefully advised, than I? And yet, warning and advice were both thrown away on me!

Let me say for myself that I was really touched by the kindness of my mother-in-law's letter—though I was not shaken by it in the smallest degree. As long as I lived, moved, and thought, my one purpose now was to make Miserrimus Dexter con-



fide to me his ideas on the subject of Mrs. Eustace Macallan's death. To those ideas I looked as my guiding stars along the dark way on which I was going. I wrote back to Mrs. Macallan, as I really felt, gratefully and penitently. And then I went out to the chaise.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## MR. DEXTER AT HOME.

I FOUND all the idle boys in the neighbourhood collected round the pony-chaise, expressing, in the occult language of slang, their high enjoyment and appreciation of the appearance of 'Ariel' in her man's jacket and hat. The pony was fidgety—he felt the influence of the popular uproar. His driver sat, whip in hand, magnificently impenetrable to the jibes and jests that were flying round her. I said 'Good morning,' on getting into the chaise. Ariel only said 'Gee up!' and started the pony.

I made up my mind to perform the journey to the distant northern suburb in silence. It was evidently useless for me

to attempt to speak; and experience informed me that I need not expect to hear a word fall from the lips of my companion. Experience, however, is not always infallible. After driving for half-an-hour in stolid silence, Ariel astounded me by suddenly bursting into speech.

‘Do you know what we are coming to?’ she asked, keeping her eyes straight between the pony’s ears.

‘No,’ I answered. ‘I don’t know the road. What are we coming to?’

‘We are coming to a canal.’

‘Well?’

‘Well! I have half a mind to upset you in the canal.’

This formidable announcement appeared to me to require some explanation. I took the liberty of asking for it.

‘Why should you upset me?’ I enquired.

‘Because I hate you,’ was the cool and candid reply.

‘What have I done to offend you?’ I asked next.

‘What do you want with The Master?’  
Ariel asked, in her turn.

‘Do you mean Mr. Dexter?’

‘Yes.’

‘I want to have some talk with Mr. Dexter.’

‘You don’t! You want to take my place. You want to brush his hair and oil his beard, instead of me. You wretch!’

I now began to understand. The idea which Miserrimus Dexter had jestingly put into her head, in exhibiting her to us on the previous night, had been ripening slowly in that dull brain, and had found its way outwards into words, about fifteen hours afterwards, under the irritating influence of my presence!

‘I don’t want to touch his hair or his beard,’ I said. ‘I leave that entirely to you.’

She looked round at me; her fat face flushing, her dull eyes dilating, with the unaccustomed effort to express herself in speech, and to understand what was said to her in return.

‘Say that again,’ she burst out. ‘And say it slower this time.’

I said it again, and I said it slower.

‘Swear it!’ she cried, getting more and more excited.

I preserved my gravity (the canal was just visible in the distance), and swore it.

‘Are you satisfied now?’ I asked.

There was no answer. Her last resources of speech were exhausted. The strange creature looked back again straight between the pony’s ears, emitted hoarsely a grunt of relief; and never more looked at me, never more spoke to me, for the rest of the journey. We drove past the banks of the canal; and I escaped immersion. We rattled, in our jingling little vehicle, through the streets and across the waste patches of ground, which I dimly remembered in the darkness, and which looked more squalid and more hideous than ever in the broad daylight. The chaise turned down a lane, too narrow for the passage of any larger vehicle, and stopped at a wall and a gate

that were new objects to me. Opening the gate with her key, and leading the pony, Ariel introduced me to the back garden and yard of Miserrimus Dexter's rotten and rambling old house. The pony walked off independently to his stable, with the chaise behind him. My silent companion led me through a bleak and barren kitchen, and along a stone passage. Opening a door at the end, she admitted me to the back of the hall, into which Mrs. Macallan and I had penetrated by the front entrance to the house. Here, Ariel lifted a whistle which hung round her neck, and blew the shrill trilling notes, with the sound of which I was already familiar as the means of communication between Miserrimus Dexter and his slave. The whistling over, the slave's unwilling lips struggled into speech, for the last time.

‘Wait till you hear The Master’s whistle,’ she said. ‘Then go upstairs.’

So ! I was to be whistled for like a dog. And worse still, there was no help for it but to submit like a dog. Had Ariel any

excuses to make? Nothing of the sort! She turned her shapeless back on me, and vanished into the kitchen region of the house.

After waiting for a minute or two, and hearing no signal from the floor above, I advanced into the broader and brighter part of the hall, to look by daylight at the pictures which I had only imperfectly discovered in the darkness of the night. A painted inscription in many colours, just under the cornice of the ceiling, informed me that the works on the walls were the production of the all-accomplished Dexter himself. Not satisfied with being poet and composer, he was painter as well. On one wall the subjects were described as ‘Illustrations of the Passions;’ on the other, as ‘Episodes in the Life of the Wandering Jew.’ Chance spectators like myself were gravely warned, by means of the inscription, to view the pictures as efforts of pure imagination. ‘Persons who look for mere Nature in works of Art’ (the inscription announced) ‘are persons to whom Mr.

Dexter does not address himself with the brush. He relies entirely on his imagination. Nature puts him out.'

Taking due care to dismiss all ideas of Nature from my mind, to begin with, I looked at the pictures which represented the Passions, first.

Little as I knew critically of Art, I could see that Miserrimus Dexter knew still less of the rules of drawing, colour, and composition. His pictures were, in the strictest meaning of that expressive word—Daubs. The diseased and riotous delight of the painter in representing Horrors, was (with certain exceptions to be hereafter mentioned) the one remarkable quality that I could discover in the series of his works.

The first of the Passion-pictures illustrated Revenge. A corpse, in fancy costume, lay on the bank of a foaming river, under the shade of a giant tree. An infuriated man, also in fancy costume, stood astride over the dead body, with his sword lifted to the lowering sky, and



watched, with a horrid expression of delight, the blood of the man whom he had just killed, dripping slowly in a procession of big red drops down the broad blade of his weapon. The next picture illustrated Cruelty, in many compartments. In one, I saw a disembowelled horse savagely spurred on by his rider at a bull-fight. In another, an aged philosopher was dissecting a live cat, and gloating over his work. In a third, two Pagans politely congratulated each other on the torture of two saints : one saint was roasting on a gridiron ; the other, hung up to a tree by his heels, had just been skinned, and was not quite dead yet. Feeling no great desire, after these specimens, to look at any more of the illustrated Passions, I turned to the opposite wall to be instructed in the career of the Wandering Jew. Here, a second inscription informed me that the painter considered the Flying Dutchman to be no other than the Wandering Jew, pursuing his interminable journey by sea. The marine adventures

of this mysterious personage were the adventures chosen for representation by Dexter's brush. The first picture showed me a harbour on a rocky coast. A vessel was at anchor, with the helmsman singing on the deck. The sea in the offing was black and rolling ; thunder-clouds lay low on the horizon, split by broad flashes of lightning. In the glare of the lightning, heaving and pitching, appeared the misty form of the Phantom Ship approaching the shore. In this work, badly as it was painted, there were really signs of a powerful imagination, and even of a poetical feeling for the supernatural. The next picture showed the Phantom Ship, moored (to the horror and astonishment of the helmsman) behind the earthly vessel in the harbour. The Jew had stepped on shore. His boat was on the beach. His crew—little men with stony white faces, dressed in funereal black—sat in silent rows on the seats of the boat, with their oars in their lean long hands. The Jew, also in black, stood with his eyes and hands raised

imploringly to the thunderous heaven. The wild creatures of land and sea—the tiger, the rhinoceros, the crocodile; the sea-serpent, the shark, and the devil-fish—surrounded the accursed Wanderer in a mystic circle, daunted and fascinated at the sight of him. The lightning was gone. The sky and sea had darkened to a great black blank. A faint and lurid light lit the scene, falling downward from a torch, brandished by an avenging Spirit that hovered over the Jew on outspread vulture-wings. Wild as the picture might be in its conception, there was a suggestive power in it which I confess strongly impressed me. The mysterious silence in the house, and my strange position at the moment, no doubt had their effect on my mind. While I was still looking at the ghastly composition before me, the shrill trilling sound of the whistle upstairs burst on the stillness. For the moment, my nerves were so completely upset, that I started with a cry of alarm. I felt a momentary impulse to open the door, and

run out. The idea of trusting myself alone with the man who had painted those frightful pictures, actually terrified me ; I was obliged to sit down on one of the hall chairs. Some minutes passed before my mind recovered its balance, and I began to feel like my ordinary self again. The whistle sounded impatiently for the second time. I rose, and ascended the broad flight of stairs which led to the ante-room. To draw back at the point which I had now reached would have utterly degraded me in my own estimation. Still, my heart did certainly beat faster than usual, when I found myself on the top of the stairs ; and I honestly acknowledge that I saw my own imprudence, just then, in a singularly vivid light.

There was a glass over the mantelpiece in the ante-room. I lingered for a moment (nervous as I was) to see how I looked in the glass.

The hanging tapestry over the inner door had been left partially drawn aside. Softly as I moved, the dog's ears of

Miserrimus Dexter caught the sound of my dress on the floor. The fine tenor voice, which I had last heard singing, called to me gently.

‘Is that Mrs. Valeria? Please don’t wait there. Come in!’

I entered the inner room.

The wheeled chair advanced to meet me, so slowly and so softly that I hardly knew it again. Miserrimus Dexter languidly held out his hand. His head inclined pensively to one side; his large blue eyes looked at me piteously. Not a vestige seemed to be left of the raging, shouting creature of my first visit, who was Napoleon at one moment and Shakspeare at another. Mr. Dexter of the morning was a mild, thoughtful, melancholy man, who only recalled Mr. Dexter of the night by the inveterate oddity of his dress. His jacket, on this occasion, was of pink quilted silk. The coverlid which hid his deformity matched the jacket in pale sea-green satin; and, to complete these strange vagaries of costume, his wrists were actually adorned

with massive bracelets of gold, formed on the severely-simple models which have descended to us from ancient times !

‘ How good of you to cheer and charm me by coming here ! ’ he said, in his most mournful and most musical tones. ‘ I have dressed, expressly to receive you, in the prettiest clothes I have. Don’t be surprised. Except in this ignoble and material nineteenth century, men have always worn precious stuffs and beautiful colours as well as women. A hundred years ago, a gentleman in pink silk was a gentleman properly dressed. Fifteen hundred years ago, the patricians of the classic times wore bracelets exactly like mine. I despise the brutish contempt for beauty and the mean dread of expense which degrade a gentleman’s costume to black cloth, and limit a gentleman’s ornaments to a finger ring, in the age I live in. I like to be bright and beautiful, especially when brightness and beauty come to see me. You don’t know how precious your society is to me. This is one of my melancholy

days. Tears rise unbidden to my eyes. I sigh and sorrow over myself; I languish for pity. Just think of what I am! A poor solitary creature, cursed with a frightful deformity. How pitiable! how dreadful! My affectionate heart—wasted. My extraordinary talents—useless or misapplied. Sad! sad! sad! Please pity me.'

His eyes were positively filled with tears—tears of compassion for himself! He looked at me and spoke to me with the wailing querulous entreaty of a sick child wanting to be nursed. I was quite at a loss what to do. It was perfectly ridiculous—but I was never more embarrassed in my life.

'Please pity me!' he repeated. 'Don't be cruel. I only ask a little thing. Pretty Mrs. Valeria, say you pity me!'

I said I pitied him—and I felt that I blushed as I did it.

'Thank you,' said Miserrimus Dexter, humbly. 'It does me good. Go a little further. Pat my hand.'

I tried to restrain myself; but my sense of the absurdity of this last petition (quite gravely addressed to me, remember !) was too strong to be controlled. I burst out laughing.

Miserrimus Dexter looked at me with a blank astonishment which only increased my merriment. Had I offended him ? Apparently not. Recovering from his astonishment, he laid his head luxuriously on the back of his chair, with the expression of a man who was listening critically to a performance of some sort. When I had quite exhausted myself, he raised his head, and clapped his shapely white hands, and honoured me with an 'encore.'

'Do it again,' he said, still in the same childish way. 'Merry Mrs. Valeria, *you* have a musical laugh--*I* have a musical ear. Do it again.'

I was serious enough by this time. 'I am ashamed of myself, Mr. Dexter,' I said. 'Pray forgive me.'

He made no answer to this ; I doubt



if he heard me. His variable temper appeared to be in course of undergoing some new change. He sat looking at my dress (as I supposed) with a steady and anxious attention, gravely forming his own conclusions, stedfastly pursuing his own train of thought.

‘Mrs. Valeria,’ he burst out suddenly, ‘you are not comfortable in that chair.’

‘Pardon me,’ I replied; ‘I am quite comfortable.’

‘Pardon *me*,’ he rejoined. ‘There is a chair of Indian basket-work at the end of the room, which is much better suited to you. Will you accept my apologies if I am rude enough to allow you to fetch it for yourself? I have a reason.’

He had a reason! What new piece of eccentricity was he about to exhibit? I rose, and fetched the chair: it was light enough to be quite easily carried. As I returned to him, I noticed that his eyes were still strangely employed in what seemed to me to be the closest scrutiny of

my dress. And stranger still, the result of this appeared to be, partly to interest and partly to distress him.

I placed the chair near him, and was about to take my seat in it, when he sent me back again, on another errand, to the end of the room.

‘Oblige me indescribably,’ he said. ‘There is a hand-screen hanging on the wall, which matches the chair. We are rather near the fire here. You may find the screen useful. Once more forgive me for letting you fetch it for yourself. Once more let me assure you that I have a reason.’

Here was his ‘reason,’ reiterated, emphatically reiterated, for the second time! Curiosity made me as completely the obedient servant of his caprices as Ariel herself. I fetched the hand-screen. Returning with it, I met his eyes still fixed with the same incomprehensible attention on my perfectly plain and unpretending dress, and still expressing the same curious mixture of interest and regret.

‘Thank you a thousand times,’ he said. ‘You have (quite innocently) wrung my heart. But you have not the less done me an inestimable kindness. Will you promise not to be offended with me, if I confess the truth?’

He was approaching his explanation! I never gave a promise more readily in my life.

‘I have rudely allowed you to fetch your chair and your screen for yourself,’ he went on. ‘My motive will seem a very strange one, I am afraid. Did you observe that I noticed you very attentively—too attentively, perhaps?’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘I thought you were noticing my dress.’

He shook his head, and sighed bitterly.

‘Not your dress,’ he said. ‘And not your face. Your dress is not pretty. Your face is still strange to me. Dear Mrs. Valeria, I wanted to see you walk.’

To see me walk! What did he mean? Where was that erratic mind of his wandering to now?

‘You have a rare accomplishment for an Englishwoman,’ he resumed ; ‘you walk well. *She* walked well. I couldn’t resist the temptation of seeing her again, in seeing you. It was *her* movement, *her* sweet simple unsought grace (not yours) when you walked to the end of the room and returned to me. You raised her from the dead, when you fetched the chair and the screen. Pardon me for making use of you ; the idea was innocent, the motive was sacred. You have distressed, and delighted me. My heart bleeds—and thanks you.’

He paused for a moment : he let his head droop on his breast—then suddenly raised it again.

‘Surely we were talking about her last night,’ he said. ‘What did I say ? what did you say ? My memory is confused ; I half remember, half forget. Please remind me. You’re not offended with me—are you ?’

I might have been offended with another man. Not with him. I was far too anxious to find my way into his confidence

—now that he had touched of his own accord on the subject of Eustace's first wife—to be offended with Miserrimus Dexter.

‘We were speaking,’ I answered, ‘of Mrs. Eustace Macallan's death; and we were saying to one another——’

He interrupted me, leaning forward eagerly in his chair.

‘Yes! yes!’ he exclaimed. ‘And I was wondering what interest *you* could have in penetrating the mystery of her death. Tell me! Confide in me! I am dying to know!’

‘Not even you have a stronger interest in that subject than the interest that I feel,’ I said. ‘The happiness of my whole life to come depends on my clearing up the mystery of her death.’

‘Good God!—why?’ he cried. ‘Stop! I am exciting myself. I mustn't do that. I must have all my wits about me; I mustn't wander. The thing is too serious. Wait a minute!’

An elegant little basket was hooked on to one of the arms of his chair. He opened it, and drew out a strip of embroidery par-

tially finished, with the necessary materials for working, all complete. We looked at each other across the embroidery. He noticed my surprise.

‘Women,’ he said, ‘wisely compose their minds, and help themselves to think quietly, by doing needlework. Why are men such fools as to deny themselves the same admirable resource—the simple and soothing occupation which keeps the nerves steady and leaves the mind calm and free? As a man, I follow the women’s wise example. Mrs. Valeria, permit me to compose myself.’

Gravely arranging his embroidery, this extraordinary being began to work with the patient and nimble dexterity of an accomplished needlewoman.

‘Now,’ said Miserrimus Dexter, ‘if you are ready, I am. You talk—I work. Please begin.’

I obeyed him, and began.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## IN THE DARK.

WITH such a man as Miserrimus Dexter, and with such a purpose as I had in view, no half-confidences were possible. I must either risk the most unreserved acknowledgment of the interests that I really had at stake, or I must make the best excuse that occurred to me for abandoning my contemplated experiment at the last moment. In my present critical situation, no such refuge as a middle course lay before me—even if I had been inclined to take it. As things were, I ran all risks, and plunged headlong into my own affairs at starting.

‘Thus far, you know little or nothing about me, Mr. Dexter,’ I said. ‘You are,

as I believe, quite unaware that my husband and I are not living together at the present time ?’

‘Is it necessary to mention your husband ?’ he asked, coldly, without looking up from his embroidery, and without pausing in his work.

‘It is absolutely necessary,’ I answered. ‘I can explain myself to you in no other way.’

He bent his head, and sighed resignedly.

‘You and your husband are not living together, at the present time ?’ he resumed. ‘Does that mean that Eustace has left you ?’

‘He has left me, and has gone abroad.’

‘Without any necessity for it ?’

‘Without the least necessity.’

‘Has he appointed no time for his return to you ?’

‘If he perseveres in his present resolution, Mr. Dexter, Eustace will never return to me.’

For the first time, he raised his head



from his embroidery—with a sudden appearance of interest.

‘Is the quarrel so serious as that?’ he asked. ‘Are you free of each other, pretty Mrs. Valeria, by common consent of both parties?’

The tone in which he put the question was not at all to my liking. The look he fixed on me was a look which unpleasantly suggested that I had trusted myself alone with him, and that he might end in taking advantage of it. I reminded him quietly, by my manner more than by my words, of the respect which he owed to me.

‘You are entirely mistaken,’ I said. ‘There is no anger—there is not even a misunderstanding between us. Our parting has cost bitter sorrow, Mr. Dexter, to him and to me.’

He submitted to be set right with ironical resignation. ‘I am all attention,’ he said, threading his needle. ‘Pray go on; I won’t interrupt you again.’ Acting on this invitation, I told him the truth about my husband and myself quite unreservedly :

taking care, however, at the same time, to put Eustace's motives in the best light that they would bear. Miserrimus Dexter laid aside his embroidery on the chair, and laughed softly to himself, with an impish enjoyment of my poor little narrative, which set every nerve in me on edge as I looked at him.

'I see nothing to laugh at,' I said, sharply.

His beautiful blue eyes rested on me with a look of innocent surprise.

'Nothing to laugh at,' he repeated, 'in such an exhibition of human folly as you have described!' His expression suddenly changed; his face darkened and hardened very strangely. 'Stop!' he cried, before I could answer him. 'There can be only one reason for your taking it as seriously as you do. Mrs. Valeria, you are fond of your husband.'

'Fond of him isn't strong enough to express it,' I retorted. 'I love him with my whole heart.'

Miserrimus Dexter stroked his magni-

ficent beard, and contemplatively repeated my words. 'You love him with your whole heart? Do you know why?'

'Because I can't help it,' I answered, doggedly.

He smiled satirically, and went on with his embroidery. 'Curious!' he said to himself; 'Eustace's first wife loved him, too. There are some men whom the women all like; and there are other men whom the women never care for. Without the least reason for it in either case. The one man is just as good as the other; just as handsome, as agreeable, as honourable, and as high in rank as the other. And yet, for Number One, they will go through fire and water; and for Number Two, they won't so much as turn their heads to look at him. Why? They don't know themselves—as Mrs. Valeria has just said! Is there a physical reason for it? Is there some potent magnetic emanation from Number One, which Number Two doesn't possess? I must investigate this when I have the time, and when I find myself in the humour.'

Having so far settled the question to his own entire satisfaction, he looked up at me again. 'I am still in the dark about you and your motives,' he said. 'I am still as far as ever from understanding what your interest is in investigating that hideous tragedy at Gleninch. Clever Mrs. Valeria, please take me by the hand, and lead me into the light. You're not offended with me—are you? Make it up; and I will give you this pretty piece of embroidery when I have done it. I am only a poor solitary deformed wretch, with a quaint turn of mind; I mean no harm. Forgive me! indulge me! enlighten me!'

He resumed his childish ways; he recovered his innocent smile, with the odd little puckers and wrinkles accompanying it at the corners of his eyes. I began to doubt whether I might not have been unreasonably hard on him. I penitently resolved to be more considerate towards his infirmities of mind and body, during the remainder of my visit.

'Let me go back for a moment, Mr,

Dexter, to past times at Gleninch,' I said. 'You agree with me in believing Eustace to be absolutely innocent of the crime for which he was tried. Your evidence at the Trial tells me that.'

He paused over his work, and looked at me with a grave and stern attention which presented his face in quite a new light.

'That is *our* opinion,' I resumed. 'But it was not the opinion of the Jury. Their verdict, you remember, was Not Proven. In plain English, the Jury who tried my husband declined to express their opinion, positively and publicly, that he was innocent. Am I right?'

Instead of answering, he suddenly put his embroidery back in the basket, and moved the machinery of his chair, so as to bring it close by mine.

'Who told you this?' he asked.

'I found it for myself, in a book.'

Thus far, his face had expressed steady attention—and no more. Now, for the first time, I thought I saw something darkly

passing over him which betrayed itself to my mind as rising distrust.

‘Ladies are not generally in the habit of troubling their heads about dry questions of law,’ he said. ‘Mrs. Eustace Macallan the Second, you must have some very powerful motive for turning your studies that way.’

‘I have a very powerful motive, Mr. Dexter. My husband is resigned to the Scotch Verdict. His mother is resigned to it. His friends (so far as I know) are resigned to it——’

‘Well?’

‘Well! I don’t agree with my husband, or his mother, or his friends. I refuse to submit to the Scotch Verdict.’

The instant I said those words, the madness in him which I had hitherto denied, seemed to break out. He suddenly stretched himself over his chair: he pounced on me, with a hand on each of my shoulders; his wild eyes questioned me fiercely, frantically, within a few inches of my face.

‘What do you mean?’ he shouted, at the utmost pitch of his ringing and resonant voice.

A deadly fear of him shook me. I did my best to hide the outward betrayal of it. By look and word, I showed him, as firmly as I could, that I resented the liberty he had taken with me.

‘Remove your hands, sir,’ I said. ‘And retire to your proper place.’

He obeyed me mechanically. He apologised to me mechanically. His whole mind was evidently still filled with the words that I had spoken to him, and still bent on discovering what those words meant.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said; ‘I humbly beg your pardon. The subject excites me, frightens me, maddens me. You don’t know what a difficulty I have in controlling myself. Never mind. Don’t take me seriously. Don’t be frightened at me. I am so ashamed of myself—I feel so small and so miserable at having offended you. Make me suffer for it. Take a stick and beat me. Tie me down in my chair. Call

up Ariel, who is as strong as a horse, and tell her to hold me. Dear Mrs. Valeria! Injured Mrs. Valeria! I'll endure anything in the way of punishment, if you will only tell me what you mean by not submitting to the Scotch Verdict?' He backed his chair penitently, as he made that entreaty. 'Am I far enough away yet?' he asked, with a rueful look. 'Do I still frighten you? I'll drop out of sight, if you prefer it, in the bottom of the chair.'

He lifted the sea-green coverlid. In another moment he would have disappeared like a puppet in a show, if I had not stopped him.

'Say nothing more, and do nothing more; I accept your apologies,' I said. 'When I tell you that I refuse to submit to the opinion of the Scotch Jury, I mean exactly what my words express. That Verdict has left a stain on my husband's character. He feels the stain bitterly. How bitterly no one knows so well as I do. His sense of his degradation is the sense



that has parted him from me. It is not enough for *him* that I am persuaded of his innocence. Nothing will bring him back to me—nothing will persuade Eustace that I think him worthy to be the guide and companion of my life—but the proof of his innocence, set before the Jury which doubts it, and the public which doubts it, to this day. He, and his friends, and his lawyers all despair of ever finding that proof, now. But I am his wife; and none of you love him as I love him. I alone refuse to despair; I alone refuse to listen to reason. If God spares me, Mr. Dexter, I dedicate my life to the vindication of my husband's innocence. You are his old friend—I am here to ask you to help me.'

It appeared to be now my turn to frighten *him*. The colour left his face. He passed his hand restlessly over his forehead, as if he was trying to brush some delusion out of his brain.

'Is this one of my dreams?' he asked, faintly. 'Are you a vision of the night?'

‘I am only a friendless woman,’ I said, ‘who has lost all that she loved and prized, and who is trying to win it back again.’

He began to move his chair nearer to me once more. I lifted my hand. He stopped the chair directly. There was a moment of silence. We sat watching one another. I saw his hands tremble as he laid them on the coverlid; I saw his face grow paler and paler, and his under lip drop. What dead and buried remembrances had I brought to life in him, in all their olden horror?

He was the first to speak again.

‘So this is your interest,’ he said, ‘in clearing up the mystery of Mrs. Eustace Macallan’s death?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you believe that I can help you?’

‘I do?’

He slowly lifted one of his hands, and pointed at me with his long forefinger.

‘You suspect somebody,’ he said.

The tone in which he spoke was low and threatening : it warned me to be careful. At the same time, if I now shut him out of my confidence, I should lose the reward that might yet be to come, for all that I had suffered and risked at that perilous interview.

‘ You suspect somebody,’ he repeated.

‘ Perhaps !’ was all I said in return.

‘ Is the person within your reach ?’

‘ Not yet.’

‘ Do you know where the person is ?’

‘ No.’

He laid his head languidly on the back of his chair, with a trembling long-drawn sigh. Was he disappointed ? Or was he relieved ? or was he simply exhausted in mind and body alike ? Who could fathom him ? Who could say ?

‘ Will you give me five minutes ?’ he asked, feebly and wearily, without raising his head. ‘ You know already how any reference to events at Gleninch excites and shakes me. I shall be fit for it again, if

you will kindly give me a few minutes to myself. There are books in the next room. Please excuse me.'

I at once retired to the circular ante-chamber. He followed me in his chair, and closed the door between us.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## IN THE LIGHT.

A LITTLE interval of solitude was a relief to me, as well as to Miserrimus Dexter.

Startling doubts beset me as I walked restlessly backwards and forwards, now in the ante-room, and now in the corridor outside. It was plain that I had (quite innocently) disturbed the repose of some formidable secrets in Miserrimus Dexter's mind. I confused and wearied my poor brains in trying to guess what the secrets might be. All my ingenuity—as after events showed me—was wasted on speculations not one of which even approached the truth. I was on surer ground, when I arrived at the conclusion that Dexter had really kept every mortal creature out of his confidence. He could never have betrayed

such serious signs of disturbance as I had noticed in him, if he had publicly acknowledged at the Trial, or if he had privately communicated to any chosen friend, all that he knew of the tragic and terrible drama acted in the bedchamber at Gleninch. What powerful influence had induced him to close his lips? Had he been silent in mercy to others? or in dread of consequences to himself? Impossible to tell! Could I hope that he would confide to Me what he had kept secret from Justice and Friendship alike? When he knew what I really wanted of him, would he arm me, out of his own stores of knowledge, with the weapon that would win me victory in the struggle to come? The chances were all against it—there was no denying that. Still, the end was worth trying for. The caprice of the moment might yet stand my friend, with such a wayward being as Miserrimus Dexter. My plans and projects were sufficiently strange, sufficiently wide of the ordinary limits of a woman's thoughts and actions, to attract his sympathies. 'Who

knows' (I thought to myself), 'if I may not take his confidence by surprise, by simply telling him the truth!'

The interval expired; the door was thrown open; the voice of my host summoned me again to the inner room.

'Welcome back!' said Miserrimus Dexter. 'Dear Mrs. Valeria, I am quite myself again. How are you?'

He looked and spoke with the easy cordiality of an old friend. During the period of my absence, short as it was, another change had passed over this most multiform of living beings. His eyes sparkled with good humour; his cheeks were flushing under a new excitement of some sort. Even his dress had undergone alteration since I had seen it last. He now wore an extemporised cap of white paper; his ruffles were tucked up; a clean apron was thrown over the sea-green coverlid. He backed his chair before me, bowing and smiling; and waved me to a seat with the grace of a dancing-master, chastened by the dignity of a lord in waiting.

‘ I am going to cook,’ he announced, with the most engaging simplicity. ‘ We both stand in need of refreshment, before we return to the serious business of our interview. You see me in my cook’s dress—forgive it. There is a form in these things ; I am a great stickler for forms. I have been taking some wine. Please sanction that proceeding by taking some wine too.’

He filled a goblet of ancient Venetian glass with a purple-red liquor, beautiful to see.

‘ Burgundy !’ he said. ‘ The King of Wines. And this is the King of Burgundies—Clos Vougeot. I drink to your health and happiness !’

He filled a second goblet for himself, and honoured the toast by draining it to the bottom. I now understood the sparkle in his eyes and the flush in his cheeks ! It was my interest not to offend him. I drank a little of his wine—and I quite agreed with him ; I thought it delicious.

‘ What shall we eat ?’ he asked. ‘ It must be something worthy of our Clos



Vougeot. Ariel is good at roasting and boiling joints, poor wretch ! But I don't insult your taste by offering you Ariel's cookery. Plain joints !' he exclaimed, with an expression of refined disgust. ' Bah ! A man who eats a plain joint is only one remove from a cannibal—or a butcher. Will you leave it to me to discover something more worthy of us ? Let us go to the kitchen.'

He wheeled his chair round ; and invited me to accompany him with a courteous wave of his hand.

I followed the chair to some closed curtains at one end of the room, which I had not hitherto noticed. Drawing aside the curtains, he revealed to view an alcove, in which stood a neat little gas stove for cooking. Drawers and cupboards, plates, dishes, and saucepans were ranged round the alcove—all on a miniature scale, all scrupulously bright and clean. ' Welcome to the kitchen !' said Miserrimus Dexter. He drew out of a recess in the wall a marble slab which served as a table, and reflected

profoundly with his hand to his head. 'I have it !' he cried—and opening one of the cupboards next, took from it a black bottle of a form that was new to me. Sounding this bottle with a spike, he pierced and produced to view some little irregularly-formed black objects, which might have been familiar enough to a woman accustomed to the luxurious tables of the rich ; but which were a new revelation to a person like myself, who had led a simple country life in the house of a clergyman with small means. When I saw my host carefully lay out these occult substances, of uninviting appearance, on a clean napkin, and then plunge once more into profound reflection at the sight of them, my curiosity could be no longer restrained. I ventured to say, 'What are those things, Mr. Dexter ? and are we really going to eat them ?'

He started at the rash question, and looked at me, with hands outspread in irrepressible astonishment.

'Where is our boasted progress ?' he cried. 'What is education but a name ?'

Here is a cultivated person who doesn't know Truffles when she sees them !'

'I have heard of truffles,' I answered, humbly. 'But I never saw them before. We had no such foreign luxuries as those, Mr. Dexter, at home in the North.'

Miserrimus Dexter lifted one of the truffles tenderly on his spike, and held it up to me in a favourable light.

'Make the most of one of the few first sensations in this life, which has no ingredient of disappointment lurking under the surface,' he said. 'Look at it; meditate over it. You shall eat it, Mrs. Valeria, stewed in Burgundy !'

He lit the gas for cooking, with the air of a man who was about to offer me an inestimable proof of his good will.

'Forgive me if I observe the most absolute silence,' he said, 'dating from the moment when I take this in my hand.' He produced a bright little stew-pan from his collection of culinary utensils as he spoke. 'Properly pursued, the Art of Cookery allows of no divided attention,' he continued,

gravely. 'In that observation you will find the reason why no woman ever has reached, or ever will reach, the highest distinction as a cook. As a rule, women are incapable of absolutely concentrating their attention on any one occupation, for any given time. Their minds will run on something else—say typically, for the sake of illustration, their sweetheart, or their new bonnet. The one obstacle, Mrs. Valeria, to your rising equal to the men in the various industrial processes of life is not raised, as the women vainly suppose, by the defective institutions of the age they live in. No! the obstacle is in themselves. No institutions that can be devised to encourage them, will ever be strong enough to contend successfully with the sweetheart and the new bonnet. A little while ago, for instance, I was instrumental in getting women employed in our local post-office here. The other day I took the trouble—a serious business to me—of getting downstairs, and wheeling myself away to the office to see how they were getting on. I

took a letter with me to register. It had an unusually long address. The registering-woman began copying the address on the receipt-form, in a business-like manner cheering and delightful to see. Half-way through, a little child, sister of one of the other women employed, trotted into the office, and popped under the counter to go and speak to her relative. The registering-woman's mind instantly gave way. Her pencil stopped; her eyes wandered off to the child, with a charming expression of interest. "Well, Lucy!" she said, "how-d'ye-do?" Then she remembered business again, and returned to her receipt. When I took it across the counter, an important line in the address of my letter was left out in the copy. Thanks to Lucy. Now a man in the same position would not have seen Lucy—he would have been too closely occupied with what he was about at the moment. There is the whole difference between the mental constitution of the sexes, which no legislation will ever alter as long as the world lasts! What does it

matter? Women are infinitely superior to men in the moral qualities which are the true adornments of humanity. Be content—oh, my mistaken sisters, be content with that!’

He twisted his chair round towards the stove. It was useless to dispute the question with him, even if I had felt inclined to do so. He absorbed himself in his stew-pan.

I looked about me in the room.

The same insatiable relish for horrors exhibited downstairs by the pictures in the hall, was displayed again here. The photographs hanging on the wall, represented the various forms of madness taken from the life. The plaster casts ranged on the shelf opposite, were casts (after death) of the heads of famous murderers. A frightful little skeleton of a woman hung in a cupboard, behind a glazed door, with this cynical inscription placed above the skull—‘Behold the scaffolding on which beauty is built!’ In a corresponding cupboard, with the door wide open, there hung in

loose folds a shirt (as I took it to be) of chamois leather. Touching it (and finding it to be far softer than any chamois leather that my fingers had ever felt before), I disarranged the folds, and disclosed a ticket pinned among them, describing the thing in these horrid lines : ‘Skin of a French Marquis, tanned in the Revolution of Ninety Three. Who says the nobility are not good for something ? They make good leather.’

After this last specimen of my host’s taste in curiosities, I pursued my investigation no further. I returned to my chair, and waited for the Truffles.

After a brief interval, the voice of the poet-painter-composer-and-cook summoned me back to the alcove.

The gas was out. The stew-pan and its accompaniments had vanished. On the marble slab were two plates, two napkins, two rolls of bread—and a dish, with another napkin in it, on which reposed two quaint little black balls. Miserrimus Dexter, regarding me with a smile of benevolent

interest, put one of the balls on my plate, and took the other himself. 'Compose yourself, Mrs. Valeria,' he said. 'This is an epoch in your life. Your first Truffle! Don't touch it with the knife. Use the fork alone. And—pardon me; this is most important—eat slowly.'

I followed my instructions, and assumed an enthusiasm which I honestly confess I did not feel. I privately thought the new vegetable a great deal too rich, and, in other respects, quite unworthy of the fuss that had been made about it. Miserrimus Dexter lingered and languished over his truffles, and sipped his wonderful Burgundy, and sang his own praises as a cook—until I was really almost mad with impatience to return to the real object of my visit. In the reckless state of mind which this feeling produced, I abruptly reminded my host that he was wasting our time, by the most dangerous question that I could possibly put to him.

'Mr. Dexter,' I said, 'have you heard anything lately of Mrs. Beauly?'



The easy sense of enjoyment expressed in his face left it at those rash words, and went out like a suddenly-extinguished light. That furtive distrust of me which I had already noticed, instantly made itself felt again in his manner and in his voice.

‘Do you know Mrs. Beauly?’ he asked.

‘I only know her,’ I answered, ‘by what I have read of her in the Trial.’

He was not satisfied with that reply.

‘You must have an interest of some sort in Mrs. Beauly,’ he said, ‘or you would not have asked me about her. Is it the interest of a friend? or the interest of an enemy?’

Rash as I might be, I was not quite reckless enough yet, to meet that plain question by an equally plain reply. I saw enough in his face to warn me to be careful with him before it was too late.

‘I can only answer you in one way,’ I rejoined. ‘I must return to a subject which is very painful to you—the subject of the Trial.’

‘Go on!’ he said, with one of his grim

outbursts of humour. 'Here I am at your mercy—a martyr at the stake. Poke the fire! poke the fire!'

'I am only an ignorant woman,' I resumed; 'and I daresay I am quite wrong. But there is one part of my husband's trial which doesn't at all satisfy me. The defence set up for him seems to me to have been a complete mistake.'

'A complete mistake?' he repeated. 'Strange language, Mrs. Valeria, to say the least of it!' He tried to speak lightly; he took up his goblet of wine. But I could see that I had produced an effect on him. His hand trembled as it carried the glass to his lips.

'I don't doubt that Eustace's first wife really asked him to buy the arsenic,' I continued. 'I don't doubt that she used it secretly to improve her complexion. But what I do *not* believe is—that she died of an overdose of the poison, taken by mistake.'

He put back the goblet of wine on the table near him, so unsteadily that he spilt

the greater part of it. For a moment, his eyes met mine; then looked down again.

‘How do you believe she died?’ he enquired, in tones so low that I could hardly hear them.

‘By the hand of a poisoner,’ I answered.

He made a movement as if he was about to start up in the chair, and sank back again, seized apparently with a sudden faintness.

‘Not my husband!’ I hastened to add. ‘You know that I am satisfied of *his* innocence.’

I saw him shudder. I saw his hands fasten their hold convulsively on the arms of his chair.

‘Who poisoned her?’ he asked—still lying helplessly back in the chair.

At the critical moment, my courage failed me. I was afraid to tell him in what direction my suspicions pointed.

‘Can’t you guess?’ I said.

There was a pause. I supposed him

to be secretly following his own train of thought. It was not for long. On a sudden, he started up in his chair. The prostration which had possessed him appeared to vanish in an instant. His eyes recovered their wild light ; his hands were steady again ; his colour was brighter than ever. Had he been pondering over the secret of my interest in Mrs. Beaulieu, and had he guessed ? He had !

‘ Answer me on your word of honour ! ’ he cried. ‘ Don’t attempt to deceive me. Is it a woman ? ’

‘ It is.’

‘ What is the first letter of her name ? Is it one of the first three letters of the alphabet ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ B. ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Beaulieu ? ’

‘ Beaulieu.’

He threw his hands up above his head, and burst into a frantic fit of laughter.

‘ I have lived long enough ! ’ he broke

out, wildly. 'At last I have discovered one other person in the world who sees it as plainly as I do. Cruel Mrs. Valeria! why did you torture me? Why didn't you own it before?'

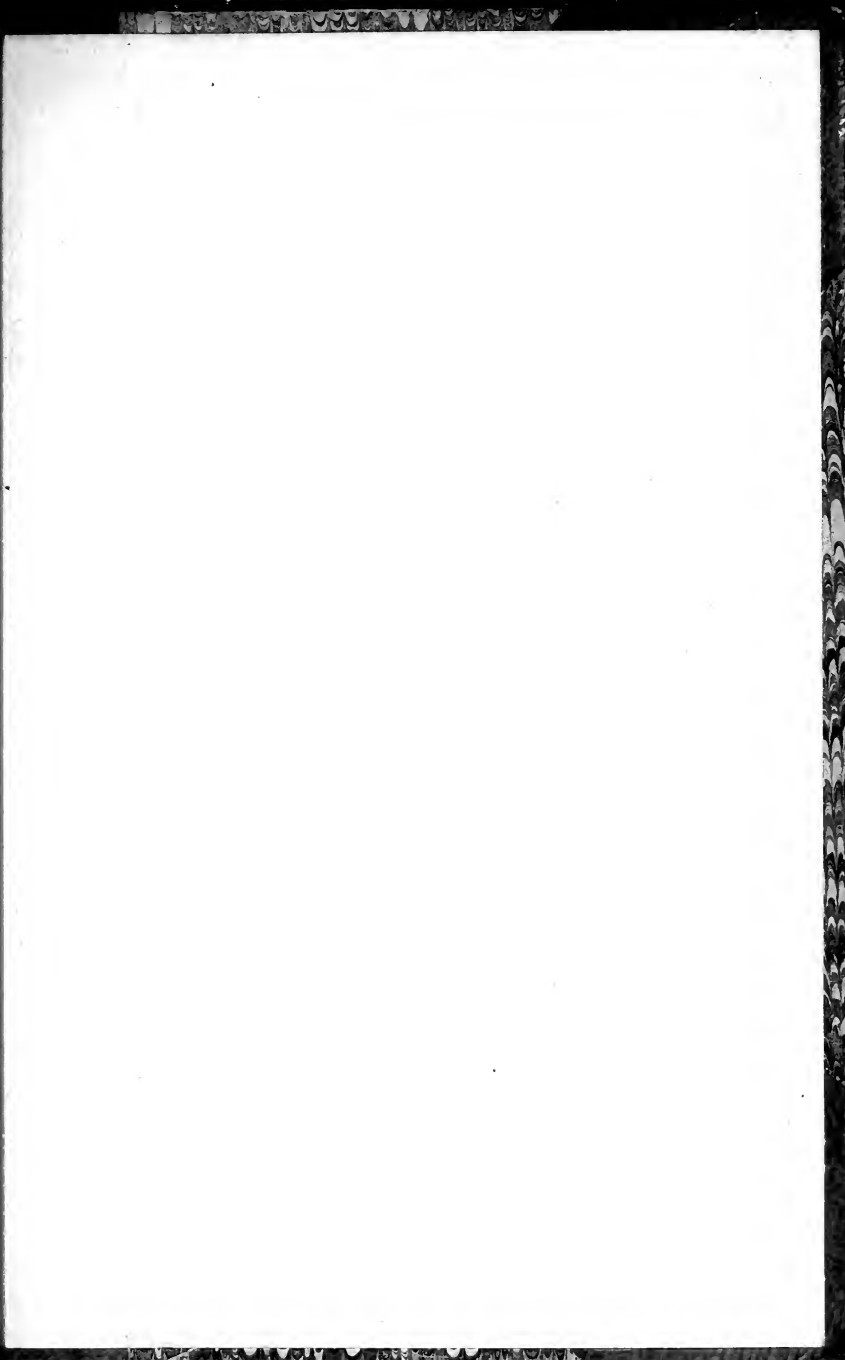
'What!' I exclaimed, catching the infection of his excitement. 'Are *your* ideas, *my* ideas? Is it possible that *you* suspect Mrs. Beauly, too?'

He made this remarkable reply:

'Suspect?' he repeated, contemptuously. 'There isn't the shadow of a doubt about it. Mrs. Beauly poisoned her.'

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





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